992.g.3
3

AN

ESSAY

ON THE APPLICATION

OF

NATURAL HISTORY

TO

POETRY.

BY J. AIKIN.

CETERA, QUÆ VACUAS TENUISSENT CARMINE MENTES,
OMNIA JAM VULGATA.

VIRGIL.

WARRINGTON:

PRINTED BY W. EYRES, FOR J. JOHNSON, NO. 72,
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, LONDON.

MDCCLXXVII.

TO

THOMAS PENNANT, Esq.
F.R.S.

OF

DOWNING, FLINTSHIRE.

SIR,

INDEPENDENTLY of the deſire I might have of publickly expreſſing my grateful ſenſe of the friendſhip with which you honour me, juſtice would ſeem to require that a piece, the original idea of which was ſolely derived from an acquaintance with your works, and which to them is indebted for its moſt valuable materials, ſhould be inſcribed to you.

ITS

Its purpoſe is ſuch as I flatter myſelf will obtain your approbation. It is to add incitements to the ſtudy of natural hiſtory, by placing in a ſtronger light than has yet been done, the advantages that may reſult from it to the moſt exalted and delightful of all arts, that of poetry. That this ſtudy is not only a ſource of agreeable and innocent amuſement, but conduces to humanize and enlarge the mind, and in various ways to promote the happineſs of mankind, has been ſufficiently proved by the obſervations of many ingenious writers. But its application to the improvement of poetry, has not, I believe, been the ſubject of particular diſcuſſion.

cuſſion. By conſidering it in this view, I therefore thought that ſomething new in its favour might be ſuggeſted; and if what I have done ſhall be the means of acquiring you a ſingle fellow-labourer in your intereſting reſearches into BRITISH ZOOLOGY, I ſhall not be diſſatisfied with my ſucceſs.

I am,

SIR,

With the ſincereſt reſpect and eſteem,

Your moſt obedient,

and obliged Servant,

WARRINGTON,
Feb. 1, 1777.

JOHN AIKIN.

Books printed for J. Johnson, No. 72, St. Paul's Church Yard, London.

Poems, by Mrs. Barbauld, 5th Edit. price 3s. ſewed.

Miſcellaneous Pieces in Proſe, by J. Aikin and A. L. Barbauld, 2d Edit. price 3s. ſewed.

Devotional Pieces, with Thoughts on the devotional Taſte, by Mrs. Barbauld. Price 3s. ſewed.

Eſſays on Song-Writing, with a Collection of ſuch Engliſh Songs as are moſt eminent for poetical Merit, by J. Aikin, 2d Edit. price 3s. 6d. ſewed.

C. Julii Agricola Vita: The Life of Agricola, by Tacitus, with a Tranſlation by J. Aikin. Price 2s. ſewed.

Selecta Quædam ex C. Plinii Secundi Hiſtoria Naturali; ad uſum Scholarum accomodata. Price 3s. bound.

AN

ESSAY

ON THE APPLICATION OF

NATURAL HISTORY

TO

POETRY.

NO literary complaint is more frequent and general than that of the inſipidity of Modern Poetry. While the votary of ſcience is continually gratified with new objects opening to his view, the lover

of poetry is wearied and diſguſted with a perpetual repetition of the ſame images, clad in almoſt the ſame language. This is uſually attributed to a real deficiency of poetical genius in the preſent age; and ſuch cauſes are aſſigned for it as would leave us little room to hope for any favourable change. But this ſolution, as it is invidious in its application, and diſcouraging in its effects, is ſurely alſo contradictory to that juſt reliſh for the beauties of poetry, that taſte for ſound and manly criticiſm, and that improvement in the other elegant arts, which muſt be allowed to characteriſe our own times. The ſtate in which poetry has been tranſmitted to us will probably afford a truer, as well as a more favourable explanation of the fact.

fact. It comes to us, worn down, enfeebled, and fettered.

THE *Epopœa*, circumſcribed as it perhaps neceſſarily is within very narrow limits, ſcarcely offers to the moſt fertile invention a ſubject at the ſame time original and proper. Tragedy, exhauſted by the infinite number of its productions, is nearly reduced to the ſame condition. The artificial conſtruction of the Ode almoſt inevitably throws its compoſer into unmeaning imitation. Elegy, converſant with a confined, and almoſt uniform train of emotions, cannot but frequently become languid and feeble. Satire, indeed, is ſtill ſufficiently vigorous and prolific; but its offſpring is little ſuited to pleaſe

a mind ſenſible to the charms of genuine poetry. It would ſeem, then, that novelty was the preſent requiſite, more, perhaps, than genius: it is therefore of importance to enquire what ſource is capable of affording it.

That novelty ſhould have been the leaſt ſought for in that very walk which might be expected to yield it in the greateſt abundance, will, doubtleſs, appear extraordinary. Yet, if it be admitted that the grand and beautiful objects which nature every where profuſely throws around us, are the moſt obvious ſtore of new materials to the poet, it muſt alſo be confeſſed that it is the ſtore which of all others he has the moſt ſparingly touched. An ingenious critic, Mr. Warton,

Warton, has remarked that " every painter of rural beauty ſince the time of Theocritus (except Thomſon) has copied his images from him, without ever looking abroad into the face of nature themſelves.*" If this be not ſtrictly juſt, it is at leaſt certain that ſupineneſs and ſervile imitation have prevailed to a greater degree in the deſcription of nature, than in any other part of poetry. The effect of this has been, that deſcriptive poetry has degenerated into a kind of phraſeology, conſiſting of combinations of words which have been ſo long coupled together, that, like the hero and his epithet in Homer, they are become inſeparable companions. It is amuſing, under ſome of the moſt

* Dedication of Warton and Pitt's Virgil.

common heads of deſcription, in a poetical dictionary, to obſerve the wonderful ſameneſs of thoughts and expreſſions in paſſages culled from a dozen different authors. An ordinary verſifier ſeems no more able to conceive of the Morn without roſy fingers and dewy locks, or Spring without flowers and ſhowers, loves and groves, than of any of the heathen deities without their uſual attributes. Even in poets of a higher order, the hand of a copyiſt may be traced much oftener than the ſtrokes of an obſerver. Has a pictureſque circumſtance been imagined by ſome one original genius? Every ſucceeding compoſer introduces it on a ſimilar occaſion. He, perhaps, improves, amplifies, and in ſome reſpect varies the idea; and in

ſo doing may exhibit conſiderable taſte and ingenuity; but ſtill he contents himſelf with an inferior degree of merit, while the materials are all before him for attaining the higheſt; and fails of gratifying that natural thirſt after *novelty* which may be ſuppoſed peculiarly to incite the reader of poetry.

THE following example of this propenſity to imitation, taken from writers of diſtinguiſhed character, will aptly illuſtrate what has been advanced.

SHAKESPEARE, in Macbeth, thus paints the approach of night.

——— to black Hecat's ſummons
The ſhard-born beetle with his drowſy hums
Hath rung night's yawning peal.

THE ſame circumſtance is repreſented in theſe lines of Milton's *Lycidas*.

——————— both together heard
What time the gray-fly * winds her ſultry horn,
Battening our flocks with the freſh dews of night.

GRAY'S *Elegy in a country church-yard* next offers the beautiful line

Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight.

LASTLY, Collins, in his *Ode to Evening*, exhibits the ſame object more minutely.

Or where the beetle winds
His ſmall, but ſullen horn,
As oft he riſes midſt the twilight path,
Againſt the pilgrim borne in heedleſs hum.

* The cockchaffer; the inſect meant in all the four paſſages.

SEVERAL other inſtances might be adduced of the introduction of the ſame circumſtance into an evening landſkip; but as they are chiefly to be met with in pieces of inferior reputation, it would be ſuperfluous to particularize them. In all the preceding quotations the image is employed with propriety, and repreſented with elegance; but its ſucceſſive adoption by ſo many different writers ſufficiently evinces what I meant to deduce from it, a real want of variety in poetical imagery, proceeding from a ſcarcity of original obſervations of nature.

THE want of variety and novelty is not, however, the only defect of thoſe poets who have occaſionally introduced

ceed the deſcription of natural objects. It is no leſs common to find their deſcriptions faint, obſcure, and ill characterized; the properties of things miſtaken, and incongruous parts employed in the compoſition of the ſame picture. This is owing to a too curſory and general ſurvey of objects, without exploring their minuter diſtinctions and mutual relations; and is only to be rectified by accurate and attentive obſervation, conducted upon ſomewhat of a ſcientific plan. As the artiſt who has not ſtudied the body with anatomical preciſion, and examined the proportions of every limb, both with reſpect to its own ſeveral parts, and the whole ſyſtem, cannot produce a juſt and harmonious repreſentation of the human frame;

frame; ſo the deſcriptive poet, who does not habituate himſelf to view the ſeveral objects of nature minutely, and in compariſon with each other, muſt ever fail in giving his pictures the congruity and animation of real life.

As theſe defects conſtantly attend every writer of inferior rank, nothing would be eaſier than to multiply inſtances of them. I ſhall, however, confine myſelf to a few, which, that they may carry more weight, ſhall be drawn from reſpectable ſources.

The genius of the eaſtern poets, bold, ardent, and precipitate, was peculiarly averſe to preciſion and accuracy. Hurried away by the warm emotions ariſing

ariſing from an idea forcibly impreſſed upon their minds, they often ſeem entirely to loſe ſight of the train of thought which the propoſed ſubject would ſeem naturally to ſuggeſt.* Hence their deſcriptions, however animated and ſtriking in certain points, are ſeldom full and diſtinct enough to form accurate repreſentations. I will venture to cite thoſe highly celebrated zoological paintings in the book of Job in confirmation of this remark. In all of theſe it is found, that ſome one property of the animal, which it indeed poſſeſſes in an eminent degree, but not excluſively, gives the leading tone to the deſcription, and occupies the whole

* See the biſhop of Oxford's truly claſſical and ingenious *Prelections on Sacred Poetry*.

attention

attention of the poet, to the neglect of every minuter, though perhaps more diſcriminating circumſtance. Thus, the ſole quality of the horſe which is dwelt upon, is his courage in war. This, indeed, is pictured with great force and ſublimity; but by images, many of which are equally applicable to any other warlike creature. Even the noble expreſſion of "his neck being cloathed with thunder," is not ſo finely deſcriptive, becauſe it is leſs appropriated, than the "luxuriat toris animoſum pectus" of Virgil; and, for the ſame reaſon, I can ſcarcely agree with Mr. Warton in preferring the paſſage "He ſwalloweth the ground with fierceneſs and rage, neither believeth he that

it

it is the ſound of the trumpet," to the lines

Stare loco neſcit; micat auribus, & tremit artus;
Collectumque premens volvit ſub naribus ignem.

THE indiſtinctneſs of moſt of the other deſcriptions in this book may be inferred from the very different opinions entertained by critics concerning the animals which the writer intended. Thus, the *behemoth* is by ſome ſuppoſed to be the elephant, by others the hippopotamus. The *reem*, abſurdly in our verſion rendered the unicorn, is variouſly interpreted the rhinoceros, urus, oryx, and biſon. What is more extraordinary, the *leviathan*, to which a whole chapter is appropriated, has, with almoſt equal plauſibility, been maintained

tained to be the whale and the crocodile — a fiſh, and an amphibious quadruped. It may, indeed, be alledged, that the deſign of the poet in this place, which was to inculcate ſublime ideas of the Divine Power and Majeſty from conſiderations of the grandeur of his works, and ſentiments of humiliation from the compariſon of human ſtrength and courage to thoſe of other creatures, did not require, or even admit of minuteneſs in zoological deſcription. Still, however, ſuch want of preciſion in the great outlines of his figures, muſt be imputed to the prevalence of a characteriſtic manner, rather than to the deciſion of the judgment.

THIS fault, if we may venture to call it ſo, to which the oriental writers, from the peculiar caſt of their genius, and an exuberance of that fire which conſtitutes the very eſſence of poetry, were liable, is not, however, that againſt which it is neceſſary to caution a modern poet. Want of knowledge, attention, or diſcernment, have occaſioned thoſe failures which the following inſtances are meant to exemplify.

LUCAN, a poet much more converſant with the ſchools of rhetoricians than with the works of nature, has contrived to ſhew great ignorance in a cloſe and ſervile copy from Virgil. That writer, in a paſſage hereafter to be quoted, deſcribes with admirable truth and

and nature thoſe preſages of an impending ſtorm which appear in the actions of certain animals. Among the reſt, he mentions that of the heron's leaving its accuſtomed haunts in the marſhes, and ſoaring to a great height in the air. This circumſtance is thus varied in the repreſentation by Lucan.

——————————— auſa volare
Ardea ſublimis, pennæ confiſa natanti.

"THE heron dares to fly on high, truſting to its ſwimming feather."

HE ſeems to have concluded that the heron, as a fowl converſant with water, muſt be a ſwimmer; whereas every one in the leaſt acquainted with the hiſtory of this bird knows that it takes its prey

only by wading, for which its long legs are admirably adapted. Some of his commentators, indeed, have attempted to free him from the imputation of ignorance, by ſuppoſing that the epithet "*ſwimming* feather" was intended to denote that eaſy motion of a bird through the air which has often been reſembled to ſailing or ſwimming. But from the whole turn of the paſſage, it appears evident to me, that Lucan meant to improve upon his original by one of thoſe antithetical points which on all occaſions he ſo much delights to introduce: the images of *flying* and *ſwimming* are therefore ſet in oppoſition to each other; and unleſs the latter be employed in its ſimple ſignification, the words "daring" and "truſting" are not at all applicable. Were even the other explanation

planation admitted, the ſmooth ſwimming motion would very ill apply to a bird which is remarkable for its heavy and laborious flight.

His variation of another circumſtance in the ſame paſſage is equally erroneous. To the crow, which Virgil deſcribes as ſtalking ſolitary over the dry ſands, he alſo attributes the action which that poet rightly appropriates to water-fowl, of daſhing the water over its body before ſtormy weather.

——caput ſpargens undis, velut occupet imbrem,
Inſtabili greſſu metitur litora cornix.

Mr. Warton's tranſlation of Virgil, though in general extremely chaſte and correct, affords one inſtance of ſimilar error in deviating from the original.

Behold for thee the neighb'ring naiad crops
The violet pale, and poppy's fragrant tops. *Ecl.* II.

THE epithet *fragrant* is the tranſlator's addition; and an improper one; ſince that plant has only a faint diſagreeable odour.

A MISTAKE, different in kind, ſince it relates to time rather than to quality, yet reſembling in ſubject, appears in Pope's firſt paſtoral. The roſe is repreſented as blowing along with the crocus and violet; though, in reality, ſome months intervene betwixt their flowering.

Here the bright crocus and blue vi'let glow,
Here weſtern winds on breathing roſes blow.

MANILIUS, in a ſhort deſcription of Africa, has improperly introduced the peaceful

peaceful and innoxious elephant into an enumeration of the fierce and venemous animals which infeſt that torrid region.

Huic varias peſtes, diverſaque membra ferarum,
Conceſſit bellis natura infeſta futuris;
Horrendos angues, habitataque membra veneno,
Et mortis partus, viventia crimina terræ;
Et vaſtos elephantes habet, ſævoſque leones,
In pœnas fœcunda ſuas, parit horrida tellus.
ASTRONOM. lib. iv.

MR. CREECH, in his tranſlation of this paſſage, has aggravated this impropriety almoſt to ridicule, by coupling the lion and elephant in one action, entirely unſuitable to the latter.

Here nature, angry with mankind, prepares
Strange monſters, inſtruments of future wars;
Here ſnakes, thoſe cells of poiſon, take their birth,
Thoſe living crimes and grievance of the earth;

Fruitful in its own plagues, the deſert ſhore
Hears elephants and frightful lions *roar*.

SHAKESPEARE, in *the two Gentlemen of Verona*, gives the following beautiful lines to the baniſhed Valentine.

Here can I ſit alone, unſeen of any,
And to the nightingale's complaining notes
Tune my diſtreſſes, and record my woes.

THE plaintive character of the nightingale renders its introduction pleaſing and proper; but Congreve, in a paſſage apparently imitated from this, has ſpoiled the image by transferring it to the lark, whoſe character is always cheerful and ſprightly.

The morning lark to mine accords his note,
And tunes to my diſtreſs his warbling throat.

IT has been already obſerved that the leviathan of Job is variouſly underſtood by

by critics for the whale and the crocodile. Both theſe animals are remarkable for the ſmallneſs of their eyes in proportion to the bulk of their bodies. Thoſe of the crocodile are indeed ſaid to be extremely piercing out of the water; in which ſenſe, therefore, the poet's expreſſion that "its eyes are like the eyelids of the morning" can only be applicable. Dr. Young, however, in his paraphraſe on this part of Job, deſcribing the crocodile as the animal intended in the original, has given the image an erroneous reference to the magnitude, rather than the brightneſs of its eye.

Large is his front; and when his burniſh'd eyes
Lift their *broad* lids, the morning ſeems to riſe.*

* HERODOTUS, ſpeaking of the crocodile, ſays, that it has the eyes of a hog: ἔχει δὲ ὀφθαλμους μεν, ὑός: Lib. II. A ſtriking contraſt to the image given of them by the poet, taken in any ſenſe.

These inſtances might be infinitely multiplied, were we to include thoſe falſe repreſentations of nature which ancient error or fable firſt introduced, but which, having been made the foundation of ingenious figures and pleaſing alluſions, the poets of every age have adopted. Such are, the ſong of the dying ſwan; the halcyon's neſt; the crocodile's tears; the pelican's feeding her young with her blood; and the whole exiſtence of the phœnix. When we recollect the multitude of beautiful images and deſcriptions formed upon theſe fictions, and that the very language of poetry is in many inſtances derived from them, we ſhall be apt to regard them not only with indulgence, but veneration. Yet, on the other hand, if we adhere to this unqueſtionable principle,

that

that nothing can be really beautiful which has not truth for its baſis; if we attend to the boundleſs variety of genuine beauties, applicable to every purpoſe of ornament, which nature liberally ſcatters around us; if we reflect on the danger of ſuffering falſehood and error habitually to intrude even in matters of the ſlighteſt importance; we ſhall ſcarcely give our aſſent to a licence, as unneceſſary as it is hazardous. A modern writer can loſe nothing by this rigour; for ſince both true and falſe wit have ſo long been employed upon theſe topics, every thing brilliant or ingenious which they can ſuggeſt, muſt have long ſince been exhauſted; and the revival of them at preſent is as much a proof of barren invention as of falſe taſte.

WHERE the profeſſed intention of the poet is the deſcription of natural objects, it cannot be doubted that every fabulous idea ſhould be religiouſly avoided. Thus, it has been remarked by Mr. Pennant, in his *Britiſh Zoology*, that Virgil, who, in ſpeaking figuratively of the ſwan as the poet's bird, aſcribes to it its uſual muſical attributes, when he mentions it under its proper character of a water-fowl, gives it the harſh note really belonging to that order of birds.

Dant ſonitum *rauci* per ſtagna loquacia cygni.
Æn. IX. 458.
The hoarſe ſwans ſcream along the ſounding marſh.

ON the other hand, Lucretius has adopted the fabulous notion of the ſwan, even in the exemplication of a philoſophical

phical propoſition. Speaking of the different nature of ſounds, he ſays,

Nec ſimili penetrant aureis primordia forma,
Quom tuba depreſſo graviter ſub murmure mugit,
Aut roboant raucum retrocita cornua bombum,
Valibus et cycni gelidis orti ex Heliconis
Cum liquidam tollunt lugubri voce querelam.

LIB. IV.

Nor are the figures of the ſeeds alike,
Which from the grave and murm'ring trumpet ſtrike,
To thoſe of dying ſwans, whoſe lateſt breath
In mournful ſtrains laments approaching death.

CREECH.

AND in another paſſage he blends this fiction with reality in a manner equally injudicious.

Parvus ut eſt cycni melior canor, ille gruum quam
Clamor, in ætheriis diſperſus nubibus Auſtri.

IBID.

As

As the low warbling of the ſwan excels
The crane's loud clangor, ſcatter'd thro' the clouds. *

THIS latter paſſage, as well as the line above quoted from Virgil, is part of a ſimile; whence I take occaſion to remark, that, as it is the buſineſs of every figure of compariſon either to illuſtrate or to enforce the ſimple idea, it is certainly requiſite that they ſhould be founded upon circumſtances to which the mind of the reader can aſſent; otherwiſe they can produce little effect. The writer of *Scriblerus* gives a ludicrous example of a ſimile built upon fiction.

Thus have I ſeen in Araby the bleſt
A phœnix couch'd upon her funeral neſt;

* CREECH's tranſlation of theſe lines is ſo very inadequate as to give no idea of the original.

a ſight

a ſight which neither the author, nor any one elſe, ever did ſee. Obvious as the abſurdity here is, the following paſſage in Milton, though written quite in the ſpirit of that divine poet, ſtands upon the very ſame ground of cenſure.

As when a gryffon thro' the wilderneſs
With winged courſe, o'er hill or moory dale
Purſues the Arimaſpian, who by ſtealth
Has from his wakeful cuſtody purloin'd
The guarded gold.

PARAD. LOST.

PERHAPS, in a modern writer we ſhould require an adherence to truth, even in the repreſentation of thoſe higher and leſs obvious parts of the œconomy of nature which come under the ſurvey of philoſophy. The Copernican theory of the ſolar ſyſtem has been now long enough eſtabliſhed to take place

of

of the Ptolemaic even in poetical allu-ſion; and the ſun, tranquilly ſeated in the centre of its vaſt dependencies, cheering, invigorating, and animating the whole, may, on every occaſion of ſublime imagery, ſupercede the chariot of Phœbus, for ever painfully dragged round the petty globe we inhabit. How inexcuſable is the reaſoning, the philoſophical Dr. Young in adopting an abſurd notion entertained by ſome of the fathers, that the final conflagra-tion of the world will begin at midnight; as if it were poſſible for night at any one inſtant to be univerſal on the globe, or an equal portion of the earth were not always illuminated by the ſun!

At midnight, when mankind is wrapt in peace,
And worldly fancy feeds on golden dreams,

To

To give more dread to man's moſt dreadful hour,
At midnight, 'tis preſum'd, this pomp will burſt
From tenfold darkneſs.

NIGHT THOUGHTS.

EVEN in the more confined parts of knowledge, with which it is not requiſite for a perſon of liberal education to be intimately acquainted, exploded errors ſhould be avoided, whenever it is thought proper to introduce ſuch ſubjects. Alluſions to chemiſtry were extremely faſhionable in the poetry of the laſt century; but ſo many falſe opinions were then received into that ſcience, that the ſame images would give diſguſt rather than pleaſure to one acquainted with it in its preſent ſtate of improvement. The fancied revivification of a flower from its aſhes, which furniſhed a topic for the wit of Cowley and D'avenant,

D'avenant, could ſcarcely be employed to advantage by a modern writer.

On the whole, although fictions of ſome kind have been juſtly accounted the very ſoul of poetry, and cannot be rejected without depriving it of its choiceſt ornaments, yet falſe repreſentations of natural things, the real properties of which are commonly known, and are equally capable of poetical uſe, cannot ſtand the teſt of ſound criticiſm. And eſpecially, the trite and hackneyed fables of ancient poets, when copied by modern writers, muſt appear as frigid and unintereſting as they are extravagant and unnatural.

Hitherto it has been chiefly attempted to ſhew that the accurate and ſcientific

ſcientific ſtudy of nature would obviate many of the *defects* uſually diſcoverable in poetical compoſitions. The more pleaſing taſk ſucceeds, of exhibiting to view the *beauties* which the poet may derive from this ſource. And here, I ſhall firſt remark, that every part of natural hiſtory does not ſeem equally capable of affording poetical imagery. The vegetable creation, delightful as it is to the ſenſes, and extenſive in utility, yields comparatively few materials to the poet, whoſe art is principally defective in repreſenting thoſe qualities in which *it* chiefly excels; colour, ſcent, and taſte. The mineral kingdom is ſtill more ſteril, and uncommodated to deſcription. The animal race, who, in common with their human lord and head, have, almoſt univerſally,

ſomewhat of moral and intellectual character; whoſe motions, habitations, and purſuits, are ſo infinitely and curiouſly varied; and whoſe connection with man ariſes to a ſort of companionſhip and mutual attachment; ſeem on theſe accounts peculiarly adapted to the purpoſes of poetry. Separately conſidered, they afford matter for pleaſing and even ſublime ſpeculation; in the rural landſkip they give animation to the objects around them; and viewed in compariſon with human kind, they ſuggeſt amuſing and inſtructive leſſons. That part of natural hiſtory termed zoology has therefore almoſt ſolely furniſhed the ſubjects of the enſuing pages.

To ſhew, by examples drawn from thoſe poets who have eminently ſucceed-

ed

ed in deſcriptions of animal nature, that this ſource has actually been productive of beauties of the moſt ſtriking kind; and to point out from the writers in natural hiſtory ſome new objects which might have improved the poetry of paſt, or may adorn that of future compoſers, will be the attempt of the remaining part of this Eſſay.

No writer among the ancients appears to have made a more advantageous uſe of zoological obſervations than Virgil. This great poet, whoſe reputation has, perhaps, been injured by his excellencies, ſince a nice attention to correctneſs and harmony is uſually thought incompatible with exalted genius, had, in reality, all that enthuſiaſtic fondneſs for the beauties of nature

which univerſally accompanies a ſublime and vigorous imagination. Of the three kinds of poetical compoſition in which he engaged, one alone, however, gave free ſcope to his talents for original deſcription. In paſtoral and epic poetry he was an imitator; but the Georgics were his own;* his favourite and finiſhed work; in which his genius diſplayed itſelf, free from every reſtraint, except ſuch as the plan of a didactic poem neceſſarily impoſed. It accordingly contains a larger ſhare of natural beauties than any other production, antient or modern, Thomſon's *Seaſons* excepted, which had the advantage of a ſtill more enlarged and unencumbered

* The rude ſketch of Heſiod can ſcarcely be accounted even a diſtant model of Virgil's Georgics.

plan.

plan. Some of theſe I ſhall ſelect for the purpoſes of this Eſſay.

Among the prognoſtics of an impending ſtorm, related in the firſt Georgic, thoſe derived from the actions of certain animals are ſingularly pictureſque. Many of theſe, it is true, are borrowed from Aratus, a Greek poet; but they are all ſo improved by the maſterly hand of Virgil, as well in the addition of new circumſtances, as the ſuperior force and beauty of the diction, that they become, in great meaſure, his own. What truth, variety, and diſtinctneſs in the following images!

Cum medio celeres revolant ex æquore Mergi,
Clamoremque ferunt ad litora, cumque marinæ

In ſicco luduat Fulicæ: notaſque paludes
Deſerit, atque altam ſupra volat Ardea * nubem.

When loud the Corm'rant ſcreams, and ſeeks the land,
And Coots and Sea-gulls ſport upon the ſand;
And the tall Hern his marſhy haunts forſakes,
And tow'rs to heav'n above the cuſtom'd lakes.
WARTON.

——————— numquam imprudentibus imber
Obfuit. aut illum ſurgentem vallibus imis
Aëriæ fugere Grues: aut Bucula cælum
Suſpiciens, patulis captavit naribus auras:
Aut arguta lacus circumvolitavit Hirundo:
Et veterem in limo Ranæ cecinere querelam.
Sæpius & tectis penetralibus extulit ova
Anguſtum Formica terens iter ———————

* THE Bittern is thought by Mr. Pennant to be the ſpecies of Heron here meant, from the obſervation of Willughby that this bird in autumn ſoars into the air with a ſpiral aſcent to a great height, making at the ſame time a ſingular noiſe. *Penn. Br. Zool.*

— et

——— et e paſtu decedens agmine magno
Corvorum increpuit denſis exercitus alis.
Jam varias pelagi volucres, & quæ Aſia circum
Dulcibus in ſtagnis rimantur prata Cayſtri,
Certatim largos humeris infundere rores;
Nunc caput objectare fretis, nunc currere in undas,
Et ſtudio incaſſum videas geſtire lavandi.
Tum Cornix plena pluvium vocat improba voce,
Et ſola in ficca ſecum ſpatiatur arena.

Sure warnings ſtill the ſtormy ſhowers precede;
The conſcious Cranes forſake the vapoury mead,
The Heifer toſſing high her head in air,
With broader noſtrils ſnuffs the gale afar;
Light ſkims the chirping Swallow o'er the flood,
The Frogs croak hoarſely on their beds of mud;
Her eggs abroad the prudent Piſmire bears,
While at her work a narrow road ſhe wears.
——— on ruſtling pinions loud
The Crows,* a numerous hoſt! from paſture homeward crowd.

* Mr. Pennant ſuppoſes the *Corvus* of Virgil to be the Rook, as the only ſpecies of the kind which is gregarious; and

Lo! various ſea-fowl, and each bird that breeds
In Aſian lakes, near ſweet Cayſter's meads,
O'er their ſmooth ſhoulders ſtrive the ſtream to fling,
And waſh in wanton ſport each ſnowy wing;
Now dive, now run upon the wat'ry plain,
And long to lave their downy plumes in vain:
Loudly the rains the boding Rook demands,
And ſolitary ſtalks acroſs the ſcorching ſands.

WARTON.

THE approaching return of fair weather is likewiſe marked out by tokens drawn from the animal creation. One of theſe forms an extremely natural and pleaſing picture.

Tum liquidas Corvi, preſſo ter gutture voces
Aut quater ingeminant: et ſæpe cubilibus altis,
Neſcio qua præter ſolitum dulcedine læti,

and the *Cornix*, mentioned a few lines below, and tranſlated Rook, the Carrion Crow. *Br. Zool.*

Inter

Inter ſe foliis ſtrepitant: juvat imbribus actis,
Progeniem parvam, dulceſque reviſere nidos.

With throats compreſs'd, with ſhrill and clearer voice,
The tempeſt gone, the cawing Rooks rejoice;
Seek with unuſual joys, on branches hung
Their much lov'd neſts, and feed their callow young.

WARTON.

IT it obſervable that Thomſon, who ſtudied nature ſo attentively as well to merit the epithet given him by Mr. Pennant of *the Naturaliſt's Poet*, has almoſt tranſlated Virgil's prognoſtics of the weather, ſcarcely adding a ſingle circumſtance. We ſhall preſently, however, find ſufficient occaſion to diſplay his unrivalled excellence in delineations from nature.

THE

THE ſubjects of the third and fourth Georgics are expreſsly zoological, and afford many fine paſſages in which the poet's accurate attention to natural hiſtory is evinced. It is worthy of obſervation, that he has, in a manner, confined his claim of originality to theſe books; introducing them with a declaration that every other ſubject of poetry is already exhauſted. If this could be ſaid with truth in the time of Virgil, how much more forcibly will it apply to the ſtate of poetry in our days?

FROM the third Georgic I ſhall ſelect a paſſage more ſimply and purely deſcriptive than perhaps any other to be met with in poetry. It is indeed ſo circumſtantial and exact that it might almoſt anſwer the purpoſe of a naturaliſt, and

and yet ſo replete with glowing expreſſion and lively fancy, that ſcarcely any thing can be more characteriſtic of the poet.—A ſtriking example how happily their reſpective ideas may be blended! This is the celebrated deſcription of the Calabrian *Cherſydrus*.

Eſt etiam ille malus Calabris in ſaltibus anguis,
Squamea convolvens ſublato pectore terga,
Atque notis longam maculoſus grandibus alvum:
Qui, dum amnes ulli rumpuntur fontibus, & dum
Vere madent udo terræ ac pluvialibus auſtris,
Stagna colit, ripiſque habitans, hic piſcibus atram
Improbus ingluviem raniſque loquacibus explet.
Poſtquam exuſta palus, terræque ardore dehiſcunt,
Exilit in ſiccum, & flammantia lumina torquens
Sævit agris, aſperque ſiti atque exterritus æſtu.
Ne mihi tum molles ſub dio carpere ſomnos,
Neu dorſo nemoris libeat jacuiſſe per herbas:
Cum, poſitis novus exuviis, nitiduſque juventa,
Volvitur,

Volvitur, aut catulos tectis aut ova relinquens,
Arduus ad ſolem, & linguis micat ore triſulcis.

Calabria's foreſts breed a baneful ſnake,
With lofty breaſt elate, and ſcaly back,
And with broad ſpots his winding belly black:
Who, when the rivers burſt their rocky bounds,
And ſouthern ſhowers bedew the vernal grounds,
Haunts the moiſt bank, and in the wat'ry bogs
Swells his dire paunch with fiſh, and croaking frogs:
But when keen heat the fens of moiſture drains,
And cleaves the glebe, he rages o'er the plains,
While mad with thirſt, and fill'd with drear amaze,
At the fierce beam his rolling eye-lids blaze.
May ne'er ſoft ſleep on a green bank, ſurpriſe,
Faſt by ſome foreſt-ſide, my drooping eyes,
When caſt his ſkin, and ſleek in youthful prime,
Recent he rides, before the ſun ſublime;
Regardleſs of the neſt, deſerts his young,
And brandiſhes and darts his triple-forked tongue.

WARTON.

THE

THE fourth Georgic is a complete hiſtory of a ſingle animal, the bee; and contains almoſt every thing that has been known and believed concerning this inſect down to the time of Swammerdam and Reaumur. Pliny's minute and curious account of the bee is in great part copied from Virgil: but this writer, who may be termed a *poetical Naturaliſt*, has added ſome little pictureſque circumſtances which would have appeared to advantage in the poem. Conformably to the propoſed deſign of ſhewing what might have been done, as well as what has been done, in enriching poetry from the ſtores of natural hiſtory, I ſhall here inſert ſome paſſages from Pliny which, in this view, appeared moſt ſtriking.

"IN-

" Interdiu ſtatio ad portas more " caſtrorum, noctu quies in matutinum, " donec una excitet gemino aut triplici " bombo, ut buccino aliquo. Tunc " univerſi provolant. ——— Quum " adveſperaſcit, in alveo ſtrepunt mi- " nus ac minus, donec una circumvo- " let eodem, quo excitavit, bombo: " et hoc caſtrorum more. Tunc re- " pente omnes conticeſcunt." " In the day time a ſentry is placed at the entrance of the hive, as in a camp. In the night all are quiet till morning; when one awakens the reſt with a loud buz two or three times repeated, like a trumpet. Then they all fly abroad.—— At the approach of evening the noiſe of the hive gradually decreaſes, till at length one flies round with the ſame buz that was the morning ſignal; when they

they are all inſtantly huſhed." Even that part which Virgil has ſo highly laboured, the homage and adoration paid by the bees to their king, would admit of a heightening from Pliny. When he goes abroad, the ſwarm not only crowd around him with awe and admiration, but conceal him from ſight; "cerni non patitur." Each wiſhes to be near him, and rejoices to be beheld by him in his duty. Wherever he alights, there the whole hoſt encamp. "Se quæque proximam illi "cupit eſſe, et in officio conſpici gau-"det. Ubicunque ille conſedit, ibi "cunctarum caſtra ſunt."

Milton, a poet confeſſedly ſupreme in the regions of fancy, has, in numerous inſtances, ſhewn an equal familiari-

ty

ty with the walks of nature. The garden of Eden, the moſt delicious rural ſcene that imagination ever painted, was not furniſhed by hackneyed ideas drawn from paſtoral poetry, but by that piercing and intelligent ſurvey through real objects, which ſeizes and appropriates to its own uſe each devious ſcattered beauty. Every flowery verſifier has materials at hand for a lover's bower; but a botaniſt* alone could have culled and ſorted the plants which compoſe the charming bower of Eve.

* The reader will note, that this term, as well as that of naturaliſt, is not, in the preſent Eſſay, confined to the adept in ſyſtems and proficient in names: it is intended to compriſe every one who ſurveys natural objects with a ſearching and diſtinguiſhing eye; whether he conſider them ſingly, or as parts of a ſyſtem, whether he call them by their trivial or learned appellations.

——————————— the roof
Of thickeſt covert was inwoven ſhade
Laurel and myrtle, and what higher grew
Of firm and fragrant leaf; on either ſide
Acanthus, and each odorous buſhy ſhrub
Fenc'd up the verdant wall; each beauteous flower,
Iris all hues, roſes and jeſſamin
Rear'd high their floriſh'd heads between, and wrought
Moſaic; underfoot the violet,
Crocus and hyacinth with rich inlay
Broider'd the ground.

PAR. LOST, BOOK IV.

IN the ſame maſterly ſtyle of deſcription are thoſe zoological ſketches, introduced in the account of the creation, BOOK VII. At the great primæval command "Be fruitful and multiply" what a living ſcene inſtantly riſes to view.

Forthwith the ſounds and ſeas, each creek and bay
With fry innumerable ſwarm, and ſhoals

Of fiſh that with their fins and ſhining ſcales
Glide under the green wave, in ſculls that oft
Bank the mid ſea: part ſingle or with mate
Graze the ſea weed their paſture, and through groves
Of coral ſtray, or ſporting with quick glance
Show to the ſun their wav'd coats dropt with gold,
Or in their pearly ſhells at eaſe, attend
Moiſt nutriment, or under rocks their food
In jointed armour watch: on ſmooth the ſeal
And bended dolphins play: part huge of bulk
Wallowing unwieldy, enormous in their gate
Tempeſt the ocean: there Leviathan,
Hugeſt of living creatures, on the deep
Stretch'd like a promontory ſleeps or ſwims
And ſeems a moving land, and at his gills
Draws in, and at his trunk ſpouts out a ſea.

THE imagery ſtill heightens when the winged race are deſcribed.

——————— there the eagle and the ſtork
On cliffs and cedar tops their eyries build:

Part

Part looſely wing the region, part more wiſe
In common, rang'd in figure wedge their way,
Intelligent of ſeaſons, and ſet forth
Their aery caravan high over ſeas
Flying, and over lands with mutual wing
Eaſing their flight; ſo ſteers the prudent crane
Her annual voyage, borne on winds; the air
Flotes as they paſs, fann'd with unnumber'd plumes:
From branch to branch the ſmaller birds with ſong
Solac'd the woods, and ſpread their painted wings
Till ev'n, nor then the ſolemn nightingale
Ceas'd warbling, but all night tun'd her ſoft lays:
Others on ſilver lakes and rivers bath'd
Their downy breaſt; the ſwan with arched neck
Between her white wings mantling proudly, rows
Her ſtate with oary feet; yet oft they quit
The dank, and riſing on ſtiff pennons, tower
The mid aereal ſky: others on ground
Walk'd firm; the creſted cock whoſe clarion ſounds
The ſilent hours, and th' other whoſe gay train

Adorns him, colour'd with the florid hue
Of rainbows and ſtarry eyes.

MR. PENNANT, who, whenever his ſubject will admit of it, joins the elegant critic to the accurate naturaliſt, remarks upon the exquiſite picture of the ſwan in the foregoing lines, that the poet had probably in his eye this beautiful paſſage of *Silius Italicus*.

Haud ſecus Eridani ſtagnis, ripâve Cayſtri
Innatat albus olor, pronoque immobile corpus
Dat fluvio, & pedibus tacitas eremigat undas.

THE reader will pardon the following very inadequate tranſlation.

Thus on the Po, or ſweet Cayſter's ſtream,
Swims the white ſwan, and all his moveleſs form
Gives to the headlong current, while beneath,
With oary feet he ſcoops the ſilent wave.

Images drawn from the animal creation make a part of the painting in thoſe moſt delightful of all deſcriptive poems, the *Allegro* and *Penſeroſo*; and the lark, cock, and nightingale admirably enliven and accord with the ſcenes in which they are introduced. Of theſe, the uncommon beauty with which the lark is deſcribed, has never, perhaps, been ſufficiently noted.

> To hear the Lark begin his flight,
> And, ſinging, ſtartle the dull night,
> From his watch-tower in the ſkies,
> 'Ere the dappled dawn doth riſe.

The ſudden, ſhrill burſt of ſong with which this bird ſalutes the earlieſt approaches of day, could not be more characteriſtically expreſſed than by the highly poetical idea of its "ſtartling

the dull night;"* and they who have remarked the vaſt height to which the ſky-lark ſoars, and his ſuſpenſion in the air in the midſt of his muſical exertions, will be ſtruck with the ſublime image of his ſky-built watch-tower. †

* Probably ſuggeſted by this of Shakeſpeare.

Steed threatens ſteed in high and boaſtful neighs,
Piercing the night's dull ear.

HENRY V.

† THE late Dr. Goldſmith, who ſeems to have been a Naturaliſt only of the bookſeller's making, but was a poet of nature's creation, has many deſcriptions in his *Hiſtory of Animated Nature* that are wrought with peculiar warmth of fancy and ſtrength of colouring. The following, of the ſky-lark's ſong, is equally correct and pictureſque. "Nothing "can be more pleaſing than to ſee the lark warbling upon "the wing; raiſing its note as it ſoars until it ſeems loſt "in the immenſe heights above us; the note continuing, "the bird itſelf unſeen; to ſee it then deſcending with a "ſwell as it comes from the clouds, yet ſinking by degrees "as it approaches its neſt, the ſpot where all its affections "are centered; the ſpot that has prompted all this joy." Pliny has nothing more rich, delicate, and expreſſive!

NUMEROUS

NUMEROUS have been the imitations of theſe celebrated pieces, and very different in point of merit. The generality of imitators have borrowed their materials almoſt entirely from the originals, varying a little their form and arrangement. Some, however, have taken only the general caſt of character and expreſſion from Milton, and have ventured to look abroad for new imagery. Of theſe, none appears to me more ſucceſsful than the author of a poem in Dodſley's Collection, vol. VI. entitled *Vacation*. In this ſprightly piece, a variety of gay and pleaſing objects, ſimilar in kind, yet individually different from thoſe of the *Allegro*, are introduced in rapid ſucceſſion; of which, the following, derived from *our* ſource, ſhew

the maſterly hand of an attentive and elegant obſerver of nature.

——— in paſtures rich below
Among the grazing cattle, ſlow
Moves the bull with heavy tread,
Hanging down his lumpiſh head.
And the proud ſteed neigheth oft
Shaking his wanton mane aloft.

——— the hoarſe-voic'd hungry rook
Near her ſtick-built neſt doth croak,
Waving on the topmoſt bough;
And the maſter ſtag below
Bellows loud with ſavage roar
Stalking all his hinds before.

——— the bat with duſky wings
Flutters round in giddy rings,
And the buzzing chaffers come
Cloſe by mine ear in ſolemn hum.

THE two laſt lines might be added to the inſtances adduced in the beginning of this Eſſay, of the introduction of the ſame image by different writers; and I know not whether it be not more naturally repreſented here than in any of them.

BUT it is in that truly excellent and original poem, Thomſon's *Seaſons*, that we are to look for the greateſt variety of genuine obſervations in natural hiſtory, and particularly in that part of it which regards the animal creation. And here I ſhall juſt remark, that the merited ſucceſs of this piece has proved a refutation of thoſe critics who deny that deſcription can properly be the ſole object of a poem, and would only admit of its occaſional introduction as part of a narra-

a narrative, didactic, or moral deſign. Why, indeed, it might have been aſked, ſhould poetry be clogged with matter ſo unfavourable to her exertions, as hiſtorical relations, philoſophical ſyſtems, or the rules of an art? Why not allow her the ſame privilege as her Siſter-Muſe, who is at liberty to employ her pencil on what parts of nature ſhe moſt delights in, and may exhibit the rural landſkip, without encumbering herſelf with the mechaniſm of a plough, or the œconomy of the huſbandman? If Virgil really deſigned to inſtruct the farmer by his Georgics, he might have done it much more effectually in plain proſe: if it was his purpoſe to inſpire a true reliſh for the beauties of nature, to write an original poem of a higher caſt than the confined plan of paſtoral would allow,

we

we may lament that he purſued a plan that neceſſarily threw ſo much of his work into details which even his verſification cannot render pleaſing. I mean not here to enter at large into a diſquiſition concerning didactic poetry; but only to ſuggeſt a compariſon between the reſult of Thomſon's unconfined plan, ſcarcely leſs extenſive than nature itſelf, and that of ſome other writers, not inferior in genius, who thought it neceſſary to ſhackle themſeles with teaching an art, or inculcating a ſyſtem.*

In

* The ſentiments of the elegant Eſſayiſt *on the writings and genius of Pope*, concerning deſcriptive Poetry, though not altogether ſo heretical as thoſe I have hazarded, are yet too much of the ſame caſt, not to make me deſirous of citing their authority. He ſays, "Mr. Pope it ſeems was of "opinion, that deſcriptive poetry is a compoſition as abſurd "as a feaſt made up of ſauces: and I know many other per-"ſons that think meanly of it. I will not preſume to ſay it "is

In ſelecting examples of zoological deſcription from the *Seaſons*, the number of thoſe entitled to applauſe is a ſource of embarraſſment; and I ſhall be obliged, through apprehenſion of exceeding the limits I would preſcribe to this Eſſay, to omit ſeveral paſſages, equal perhaps in beauty to thoſe extracted.

The firſt page affords a pleaſing ſpe-

"is equal, either in dignity or utility, to thoſe compoſitions "that lay open the internal conſtitution of man, and that "IMITATE characters, manners, and ſentiments. I may "however remind ſuch contemners of it, that, in a ſiſter-art, "landſcape-painting claims the very next rank to hiſtory-"painting; being ever preferred to ſingle portraits, to pieces "of ſtill-life, to droll figures, to fruit and flower-pieces; "that Titian thought it no diminution of his genius, to "ſpend much of his time in works of the former ſpecies; "and that, if their principles lead them to condemn Thom-"ſon, they muſt alſo condemn the Georgics of Virgil, and "the greateſt part of the nobleſt deſcriptive poem extant, I "mean, that of Lucretius."

cimen

cimen of that natural calendar which ſome ingenious writers have attempted to eſtabliſh on the concurrence of changes in the ſeaſons with certain appearances in the animal and vegetable creation. The unſettled ſtate between the termination of winter and the beginning of ſpring, when each by turns exerciſes dominion over the dubious year, is repreſented by the pictureſque circumſtances, that

——————————————————ſcarce
The Bittern knows his time, with bill ingulph'd
To ſhake the ſounding marſh; or from the ſhore
The Plovers when to ſcatter o'er the heath,
And ſing their wild notes to the liſtening waſte.

But the ſoft vernal ſeaſon is fully confirmed, when that delightful theme opens on the poet, which he emphatically calls

calls *the Paſſion of the groves.* In how ſuperior a ſtrain to the herd of copyiſts and imitators, has this *deſigner from nature* exhibited a ſubject of all others the moſt common in rural deſcription, the muſic of birds!

——————————— Up-ſprings the lark,
Shrill-voic'd and loud, the meſſenger of morn;
Ere yet the ſhadows fly, he mounted ſings
Amid the dawning clouds, and from their haunts
Calls up the tuneful nations. Every copſe
Deep-tangled, tree irregular, and buſh
Bending with dewy moiſture, o'er the heads
Of the coy quiriſters that lodge within,
Are prodigal of harmony. The thruſh
And wood-lark, o'er the kind-contending throng
Superior heard, run through the ſweeteſt length
Of notes; when liſtening Philomela deigns
To let them joy, and purpoſes, in thought
Elate, to make her night excel their day.
The black-bird whiſtles from the thorny brake;

The

The mellow bullfinch* anſwers from the grove:
Nor are the linnets, o'er the flowering furze
Pour'd out profuſely, ſilent. Join'd to theſe
Innumerous ſongſters, in the freſhening ſhade
Of new-ſprung leaves, their modulations mix
Mellifluous. The jay, the rook, the daw,
And each harſh pipe, diſcordant heard alone,
Aid the full concert: while the ſtock-dove breathes
A melancholy murmur thro' the whole.

THE introduction of ſome of the harſher tones as an agreeable addition to the ſylvan concert, is a new idea, and as well muſically as poetically proper. But poetry has a privilege beyond muſic in this reſpect, and might produce harmony from a combination of notes all jarring and diſcordant, if they were in uniſon with ſome natural ſcene

*HERR is a ſlight error in the deſcription, the wild note of this bird being harſh and diſagreeable, and the *mellowneſs* only acquired by teaching.

which

which from its novelty or grandeur afforded a fit ſubject for deſcription. Every reader of taſte will be convinced of the truth of this aſſertion by the following paſſage, which wants only the form of verſe to be truly poetical. "The notes of all the ſea-birds (ſays "Mr. Pennant in his *Britiſh Zoology*) "are extremely harſh or inharmonious. "We have often reſted under the rocks "attentive to the various ſounds over "our heads, which, mixed with the "ſolemn roar of the waves ſwelling into "and retiring from the vaſt caverns be-"neath, have produced a fine effect. "The ſharp voice of the ſea-gulls, the "frequent chatter of the guillemots, the "loud note of the auks, the ſcream of "the herons, together with the hoarſe, "deep, periodical croak of the corvo-

"rants,

" rants, which ſerves as a baſe to the " reſt, have often furniſhed us with a " concert, which joined with the wild " ſcenery that ſurrounded us, afforded, " in a high degree, that ſpecies of plea- " ſure, which ariſes from the novelty, " and, we may ſay, gloomy grandeur " of the entertainment."

To return to our poet. After the amorous concert has produced its effect in diſpoſing the fair auditors to form " connubial leagues" with the performers, how natural and pleaſing the deſcription of their firſt domeſtic cares in chuſing a ſituation for their neſts, and building them!

——— ——— Some to the holly-hedge
Neſtling repair, and to the thicket ſome;
Some to the rude protection of the thorn

Commit their feeble offspring: the cleft tree
Offers its kind concealment to a few,
Their food its inſects, and its moſs their neſts.
Others apart, far in the graſſy dale,
Or roughening waſte, their humble texture weave.
But moſt in woodland ſolitudes delight,
In unfrequented glooms, or ſhaggy banks,
Steep, and divided by a babb'ling brook,
Whoſe murmurs ſoothe them all the live-long day,
When by kind duty fix'd. Among the roots
Of hazel, pendant o'er the plaintive ſtream,
They frame the firſt foundation of their domes;
Dry ſprigs of trees, in artful fabric laid,
And bound with clay together. Now 'tis nought
But reſtleſs hurry thro' the buſy air,
Beat by unnumber'd wings. The ſwallow ſweeps
The ſlimy pool, to build his hanging houſe
Intent. And often, from the careleſs back
Of herds and flocks, a thouſand tugging bills
Pluck hair and wool: and oft, when unobſerv'd
Steal from the barn a ſtraw: till ſoft and warm,
Clean and complete, their habitation grows.

With the ſame truth, delicacy, and minuteneſs are deſcribed the other offices of the parental charge among the pleaſing inhabitants of the grove: ſitting, hatching, rearing their young, protecting them from danger, and teaching them to fly. All theſe are original pieces; for no poet before Thomſon had thought of *ſtudying* in fields and woods. It is ſaid of that admirable deſigner of wild animals, Mr. Ridinger of Vienna, that he has frequently paſſed whole nights in the depths of foreſts for the purpoſe of viewing the fierce and ſolitary inhabitants in their native abodes, with all the actions and manners of their ſavage ſtate. It cannot be doubted that Thomſon muſt have beſtowed equal attention and diligence in examining thoſe parts

of animated nature which occupy ſo diſtinguiſhed a place in his paintings.

THE deſcriptions referred to above, have all a character of elegance, gayety, or ſoftneſs; the following riſes to ſublimity.

High from the ſummit of a craggy cliff
Hung o'er the deep, ſuch as amazing frowns
On utmoſt Kilda's ſhore, whoſe lonely race
Reſign the ſetting ſun to diſtant worlds,
The royal eagle draws his vigorous young,
Strong pounc'd, and ardent with paternal fire.
Now fit to raiſe a kingdom of their own,
He drives them from his ſort, the towering ſeat,
For ages, of his empire; which in peace,
Unſtain'd he holds, while many a league at ſea
He wings his courſe, and preys in diſtant iſles.

THE circumſtance of the parent eagles' driving their young, as ſoon as reared,

reared, from the limits of their kingdom, is not only poetical, but agreeable to ancient obſervation. Pliny relates it with his uſual elegance. "Adultos "perſequitur parens, et longé fugat, "æmulos ſcilicet rapinæ. Et alioqui "unum par aquilarum magno ad popu- "landum tractu, ut ſatietur, indiget." "The parent bird purſues its adult young, and drives them afar, as rivals in rapine. For a ſingle pair of eagles requires a large tract for preying in, to provide a ſufficiency of food."

A PLEASING contraſt to the manners of this ſolitary tyrant is exhibited in thoſe of the various kinds of domeſtic fowl; which are thus grouped in a truly rural landſkip.

Should I my ſteps turn to the rural ſeat,
Whoſe lofty elms, and venerable oaks,
Invite the rook, who high amid the boughs,
In early Spring, his airy city builds,
And ceaſeleſs caws amuſive; there, well-pleas'd,
I might the various polity ſurvey
Of the mixt houſhold kind. The careful hen
Calls all her chirping family around,
Fed and defended by the fearleſs cock;
Whoſe breaſt with ardour flames, as on he walks,
Graceful, and crows defiance. In the pond,
The finely-checker'd duck, before her train,
Rows garrulous. The ſtately-ſailing ſwan
Gives out his ſnowy plumage to the gale;
And, arching proud his neck, with oary feet
Bears forward fierce, and guards his oſier iſle,
Protective of his young. The turkey nigh,
Loud-threatning, reddens; while the peacock ſpreads
His every-colour'd glory to the ſun,
And ſwims in radiant majeſty along.
O'er the whole homely ſcene, the cooing dove
Flies thick in amorous chace, and wanton rolls
The glancing eye, and turns the changeful neck.

WERE it not that this author affords the moſt perfect examples of thoſe beauties which I would propoſe for imitation, I ſhould apprehend being thought altogether unreaſonable in quotations from him. But, preſuming upon the reader's indulgence on this account, I ſhall venture to tranſcribe one other paſſage, in which our painter, who unites all the minuteneſs and accuracy of the Flemiſh, with the beauty and grandeur of the Roman ſchool, has drawn a ſcene ſo ſurpriſingly natural, that our perception of it is no leſs lively than if it really exiſted before our eyes. It is perfect ſtill life; the repreſentation of a hot ſummer's noon.

——————————— The daw,
The rook and magpie, to the grey-grown oaks
That the calm village in their verdant arms,

Sheltering, embrace, direct their lazy flight;
Where on the mingling boughs they ſit embower'd,
All the hot noon, till cooler hours ariſe.
Faint, underneath, the houſhold fowls convene;
And in a corner of the buzzing ſhade,
The houſe-dog, with the vacant grey-hound, lies
Out-ſtretch'd and ſleepy. In his ſlumbers one
Attacks the nightly thief, and one exults
O'er hill and dale; till, wakened by the waſp,
They, ſtarting, ſnap.

A STRIKING inſtance of the extraordinary effect of a well-choſen epithet in adding life and force to a deſcription, is ſhewn in the expreſſion "*buzzing* ſhade." A ſingle word here conveys to the mind all the imagery of a paſſage in the ſame author which Mr. Warton juſtly commends as equally new and pictureſque.

Reſounds the living ſurface of the ground:
Nor undelightful is the ceaſeleſs hum

To

To him that muſes through the woods at noon;
Or drowſy ſhepherd, as he lies reclin'd
With half-ſhut eyes.

It is by means of ſuch bold comprehenſive touches as theſe, that Poetry is frequently enabled to produce more lively repreſentations than Painting, even of ſenſible objects.

The inſtances hitherto quoted all refer to the application of images drawn from natural hiſtory to the purpoſes of *ſimple deſcription*. They are, however, capable of being uſed to advantage in the ſeveral *figures of compariſon*; and thereby admit of application in various kinds of poetical compoſitions, where they could not have place as primary objects.

The

THE diſtinguiſhed rank which *ſimiles* bear among the decorations of epic poetry has been remarked by all critics, ancient and modern. Indeed, as the writings of Homer were the foundation of every idea concerning the *Epopœa*, it was impoſſible that an object ſo ſtriking in them ſhould have eſcaped notice. Homer, in reality, as Mr. Pope obſerves, "excels all "mankind in the number, variety, and "beauty of his compariſons." He perhaps may in various inſtances manage and apply them without exact propriety; but he almoſt always offers ſomething beautiful or ſublime to the imagination of his reader; and what is particularly to our preſent purpoſe, his ſimiles are a moſt valuable ſtore of accurate deſcriptions of nature. That

minute-

minuteneſs of detail, running out into circumſtances foreign to the point of ſimilitude, which has been cenſured, perhaps juſtly, as an imperfection in them, conſidered as figures of compariſon, renders them peculiarly excellent as pieces of natural hiſtory. They are neither confined to the ſingle object which correſponds to the thing compared, nor do they turn ſolely upon thoſe obvious and well known properties of the ſubject which might be learned from a curſory ſurvey, or the information of common language; but they every-where evince the man who had ſedulouſly, with his own eyes, examined the face of nature, and whoſe rapid flow of conception would not ſuffer him to ſuppreſs any circumſtances which could add beauty or animation

nimation to his pictures. Conſidered, therefore, as deſcriptive ſketches rather than ſimiles, they are truly admirable, and deſerve to be accurately ſtudied. I ſhall ſelect a few of the moſt ſtriking, which, beſides the pleaſure they may afford in the peruſal, may give occaſion to ſome remarks not unimportant to our purpoſe.

THE Grecian army pouring over the plain of Scamander, is compared to a flock of water-fowl, in a few lines finely deſcriptive of the manners of that claſs of birds.

——— ὡς ὀρνίθων πετεηνων εθνεα πολλα,
Χηνων, η γερανων, η κυκνων δολιχοδειρων,
Ασιω εν λειμωνι, Καυστριω αμφι ρεεθρα,
Ενθα και ενθα ποτωνται αγαλλομεναι πτερυγεσσι,
Κλαγγηδον προκαθιζοντων, σμαραγει δε τε λειμων.

IL. II. 459.

Not

Not leſs their number than th' embody'd cranes,
Or milk-white ſwans in Aſius' watry plains,
That o'er the windings of Cayſter's ſprings,
Stretch their long necks, and clap their ruſtling wings,
Now tow'r aloft, and courſe in airy rounds;
Now light with noiſe; with noiſe the field reſounds.

POPE.

THE expreſſion in the fourth line of the original is peculiarly excellent, both with regard to ſenſe and ſound; and is but inadequately rendered in the tranſlation.

THE works of Homer afford no proper deſcription of the war-horſe; for the uſe of cavalry being unknown at the ſiege of Troy, the warlike properties of that creature were not diſplayed to advantage in its leſs honourable ſtation of being

being harneſſed to a chariot. Beauty and ſwiftneſs are the diſtinguiſhing qualities of his moſt celebrated courſers; many of which would probably have made no ignoble figure at Newmarket. Under this character, the following picture of a high-bred ſtallion galloping to paſture, as reſembled to Paris iſſuing gallantly armed to the field, is perhaps the moſt exquiſitely beautiful that a poet ever drew.

Ὡς δ' ὁτε τις ϛατος ἱππος, ακοϛησας επι φατνῃ,
Δεσμον απορρηξας θειει πεδιοιο κροαινων,
Ειωθως λοεσθαι ευρρειος ποταμοιο,
Κυδιοων· ὑψε δε καρη εχει, αμφι δε χαιται
Ωμοις αισσονται· ὁ δ' αγλαιηφι πεποιθως,
Ριμφα ἑ γουνα φερει μετα τ' ηθεα και νομον ἱππων.

Il. VI. 506.

The wanton courſer thus, with reins unbound,
Breaks from his ſtall, and beats the trembling ground;

Pamper'd

Pamper'd and proud, he ſeeks the wonted tides,
And laves, in height of blood, his ſhining ſides;
His head now freed he toſſes to the ſkies;
His mane diſhevel'd o'er his ſhoulders flies;
He ſnuffs the females in the diſtant plain,
And ſprings, exulting, to his fields again.

POPE.

No animal has ſupplied Homer with ſo much matter for compariſon as the lion. The ſuperior ſtrength and courage of this royal beaſt have acquired him the honour of being ſucceſſively the type of every favourite hero in the Iliad.* His appearance is, indeed, too little varied in ſeveral inſtances; yet the

* IT is remarkable, that although the Lion was never an inhabitant of Europe, or, at leaſt, only of a very ſmall part of it, the admiration of his generous qualities has given him as ſuperior a ſhare in the armorial enſigns of every European nation, as he poſſeſſes in Homer's ſimiles. May not the works of this poet have been the chief means of introducing him to ſuch general favour?

whole

whole forms no inconſiderable portion of his natural hiſtory. The paſſage of all others which contains the greateſt number of particulars concerning him, repreſented in the nobleſt ſtyle of painting, is that in which he is likened to Achilles about to engage with Æneas.

——————————— λεων ὡς
Σινῆς, ὁν τε και ανδρες αποκταμεναι μεμαασιν,
Αγρομενοι, πας δημος· ὁ δε, πρωτον μεν ατιζων,
Ερχεται, αλλ' ὁτε κεν τις αρηιθοων αιζηων
Δουρι βαλη, ἑαλη τε χανων, περι τ' αφρος οδοντας
Γιγνεται, εν δε τε οἱ κραδιη ςενει αλκιμον ητορ,
Ουρη δε πλευρας τε και ισχια αμφοτερωθεν
Μαςιεται, ἑε δ' αυτον εποτρυνει μαχεσασθαι·
Γλαυκιοων δ' ιθυς φερεται μενει· ηντινα πεφνη
Ανδρων, η αυτος φθιεται πρωτω εν ὁμιλω·

Il. XX. 164.

——————————— Such the lion's rage
Who viewing firſt his foes with ſcornful eyes,
Tho'

Tho' all in arms the peopled city riſe,
Stalks careleſs on, with unregarding pride;
Till at the length, by ſome brave youth defy'd,
To his bold ſpear the ſavage turns alone,
He murmurs fury with a hollow groan;
He grins, he foams, he rolls his eyes around;
Laſh'd by his tail his heaving ſides reſound;
He calls up all his rage; he grinds his teeth,
Reſolv'd on vengeance, or reſolv'd on death.

POPE.

IN Pliny's account of the lion there are ſeveral circumſtances ſo perfectly agreeing with this deſcription, that one cannot but ſuſpect the Naturaliſt to have copied from the poet. "Spernens tela "diu ſe terrore ſolo tuetur, ac velut "cogi teſtatur: coorituque non tan- "quam periculo coactus, ſed tanquam "amentiæ iratus." "Scorning the hunter's darts, he long defends himſelf by the terror alone which he inſpires,

and as it were teſtifies that he is forced to engage; and he at length rouſes, not as if compelled by danger, but maddened by fury." "Vulneratus obſer-"vatione mira percuſſorem novit, et "in quantalibet multitudine adpetit." "When wounded he marks his aſſailant with wonderful attention, and ſingles him out in the midſt of the greateſt throng." A circumſtance not mentioned by Homer, which adds much to the heroical character of this animal, is related by Pliny. This is, that, upon open ground, and in full view, though urged by the warmeſt onſet of dogs and men, he retreats ſlowly, and in a fighting poſture; but when his diſgrace is concealed among woods and thickets, he flies with the utmoſt precipitation.

The wild-boar is another warlike ſavage which ſerves as a frequent object of compariſon with the ferocious heroes of the Iliad. Idomeneus waiting the attack of Æneas gives occaſion to a ſpirited deſcription of this animal in the following ſimile.

——— ὡς ὁτε τις συς ȣρεσιν αλκι πεποιθως,
Ὁςε μενει κολοσυρτον επερχομενον πολυν ανδρων
Χωρω εν οιοπολω, φρισσει δε τε νωτον ὑπερθεν·
Οφθαλμω δ' αρα οἱ πυρι λαμπετον· αυταρ οδοντας
Θηγει, αλεξασθαι μεμαως κυνας, ηδε και ανδρας.

Il. XIII. 471.

As the fell boar on ſome rough mountain's head,
Arm'd with wild terrors, and to ſlaughter bred,
When the loud ruſticks riſe, and ſhout from far,
Attends the tumult, and expects the war;
O'er his bent back the briſtly horrors riſe,
Fire ſtreams in lightning from his ſanguine eyes,

His foaming tuſks both dogs and men engage,
But moſt his hunters rouſe his mighty rage.

POPE.

JUSTICE to Homer obliges me to remark ſeveral imperfections in Mr. Pope's tranſlation of this paſſage, which injure both its ſpirit and correctneſs. The ſecond line is not only entirely expletive, but contains an inaccurate idea. "To ſlaughter bred" can only be applied with propriety to an animal of prey; whereas the boar never attacks other creatures but in defence of itſelf or its young. The fourth line is enfeebled by an unmeaning pleonaſm. In the ſeventh, the whole application of the ſimile and ſenſe of the author is perverted, by repreſenting the animal as already engaged with its foes, inſtead of remaining in a poſture to receive their

their attack. The laſt line is quite unwarranted by the original; and although the tranſlation is thus protracted to an unuſual length, a circumſtance of importance in the deſcription, that of the boar's whetting his tuſks, is omitted.

A SIMILE which has, perhaps, more of the *terrible* than any other in Homer, yet is truly beautiful as a painting in natural hiſtory, is that wherein the Myrmidons, eager for combat, are compared to a troop of wolves burning with thirſt after devouring their prey.

——————————— λυκοι ὡς

Ὠμοφαγοι, τοισιν τε περι φρεσιν ασπετος αλκη,
Οἰτ' ελαφον κεραον μελαν ὑρεσι δηωσανλες
Δαπτουσιν· πασιν δε παρηιον ἁιματι φοινον,

Και τ' αγεληδον ιασιν απο κρηνης μελανυδρε,
Λαψοντες γλωσσησιν αραιησιν μελαν ὑδωρ
Ακρον, ερευγομενοι φονον ἁιματος· εν δε γε θυμος
Στηθεσιν ατρομος εστι, περισσενεται δε τε γαστηρ.

Il. XVI. 156.

Grim as voracious wolves that ſeek the ſprings
When ſcalding thirſt their burning bowels wrings.
(When ſome tall ſtag, freſh-ſlaughter'd in the wood,
Has drench'd their wide inſatiate throats with blood)
To the black fount they ruſh, a hideous throng,
With paunch diſtended, and with lolling tongue,
Fire fills their eye, their black jaws belch the gore,
And gorg'd with ſlaughter, ſtill they thirſt for more.

Pope.

In this, alſo, the tranſlator has ſhewn a want of attention to the correctneſs of delineation in his original, by entirely omitting a part of the deſcription very characteriſtic of the *genus* to which the animal belongs. This is the manner of their

their drinking, and form of their tongues, which Homer minutely deſcribes by the words,

Λαψονλες γλοσσησιν αφαιησιν μελαν ὑδωρ
Αιρον.

"Lapping the ſurface of the water with their ſlender tongues."

Such is the variety of nature, that original painters, even of the ſame ſubject, need not be apprehenſive of falling into an unintereſting ſameneſs. One of the moſt ſtriking and animated pieces in all Thomſon's *Seaſons*, is the deſcription of wolves deſcending from the mountains in the depth of winter; and notwithſtanding the minute accuracy of Homer's repreſentation, the reader will find in no part of Thomſon's the inſipid air of a copy.

By wintry famine rous'd, from all the tract
Of horrid mountains which the ſhining Alps,
And wavy Appenine, and Pyrenees,
Branch out ſtupendous into diſtant lands;
Cruel as death, and hungry as the grave!
Burning for blood! bony, and ghaunt, and grim!
Aſſembling wolves in raging troops deſcend;
And, pouring o'er the country, bear along,
Keen as the north-wind ſweeps the gloſſy ſnow.
All is their prize. They faſten on the ſteed,
Preſs him to earth, and pierce his mighty heart.
Nor can the bull his awful front defend,
Or ſhake the murdering ſavages away.
Rapacious, at the mother's throat they fly,
And tear the ſcreaming infant from her breaſt.
The godlike face of Man avails him nought.
Even beauty, force divine! at whoſe bright glance
The generous lion ſtands in ſoftened gaze,
Here bleeds, a hapleſs undiſtinguiſh'd prey.
But if, appriz'd of the ſevere attack,
The country be ſhut up, lur'd by the ſcent,
On church-yards drear (inhuman to relate!)
The diſappointed prowlers fall, and dig

The ſhrouded body from the grave; o'er which,
Mix'd with foul ſhades, and frighted ghoſts, they howl.

THE liberties Mr. Pope has every where taken in his tranſlation of Homer were, perhaps, in great meaſure neceſſary in order to ſuſtain the dignity eſſential to modern heroic poetry. But when ſubjects of natural hiſtory come before him, he ſometimes appears not only too nice and faſtidious in his exceptions, but deficient in the knowledge requiſite to make judicious alterations. The compariſon of Menelaus, not to be repulſed from the dead body of Patroclus, to a teizing fly, * may, perhaps, juſtly be regarded as inconſiſtent with the majeſty of epic poetry; but it is little

* IL. XVII. 570.

improved

improved in the tranſlation by the ſubſtitution of a hornet, at the expence of whatever was natural in the reſemblance. The following ſimile has undergone as bold an alteration from the tranſlator, without any apparent neceſſity. The Greeks flying before Hector and Æneas, are thus compared by Homer.

Των δ' ὡς τε ψαρων νεφος ερχεται, ηε κολοιων
Ουλον κεκληγοντες, ὁτε προιδωσιν ιοντα
Κιρκον, ὁ, τε Σμικρησι φονον φερει ορνιθεσσιν·

Il. XVII. 755.

Literally thus: "As a cloud of ſtares or daws fly diſmally ſhrieking, when they deſcry the approach of the *Circus*, * which brings ſlaughter to ſmall birds."

* In the Odyſſey this bird is called ἱρηξ κιρκος, ελαφροταλος πετεηνων: "the hawk Circus, the ſwifteſt of birds." Lib. XIII. V. 86.

Mr.

Mr. Pope chooſes to render the paſſage as follows.

Wedg'd in one body, like a flight of cranes,
That ſhriek inceſſant while the falcon hung
High on pois'd pinions, threats their callow young.

Pope.

By ſubſtituting one of the largeſt ſpecies of fowl to the ſmall birds of the original, he, doubtleſs, thought to give elevation to the compariſon; but he has thereby drawn a picture which has, I believe, nothing of reality, in place of one extremely natural and familiar to a common obſerver.

I shall borrow one more ſimile from Homer, in which a ſubject of the vegetable kingdom is elegantly characteriſed

terifed and pleafingly applied. It is the beautiful compariſon of the young Simoiſius ſlain to a fallen poplar.

——————————— αιγειρος ὡς

Ἡ ρα τ' εν ειαμενη ἑλεος μεγαλοιο πεφυκει,
Λειη αταρ τε οἱ οζοι επ' ακροτατη πεφυασι·
Την μεν Σ' ἁρματοπηγος ανηρ αιθωνι σιδηρω
Εξεταμ', οφρα ιτυν καμψη περικαλλει δἰφρω,
Ἡ μεν τ' αξομενη κειται ποταμοιο παρ' οχθας.

Il. IV. 482.

So falls a poplar, that in watry ground
Rais'd high the head, with ſtately branches crown'd,
(Fell'd by ſome artiſt with his ſhining ſteel,
To ſhape the circle of the bending wheel)
Cut down it lies, tall, ſmooth, and largely ſpread,
With all its beauteous honours on its head;
There left a ſubject to the wind and rain,
And ſcorch'd by ſuns, it withers on the plain.

Pope.

As

As a contraſt to this pathetic image of proſtrate youth and beauty, I ſhall preſent the reader with a noble ſimilitude, drawn from the ſame ſource, of manly ſtrength and dignity ſuffering under the decays of age. It is taken from an elegant moral fable in Spenſer's *Shepherd's Calendar*.

There grew an aged Tree on the greene,
A goodly Oake ſometime it had beene,
With armes full ſtrong and largely diſplaide,
But of their leaves they were diſaraide:
The bodie bigge, and mightily pight, *
Throughly rooted, and of wondrous hight:
Whilome had beene the king of the field,
And mochel maſt to the huſband did yeeld,
And with his nuts larded many ſwine;
But now the gray moſſe marred his rine,
His bared boughes were beaten with ſtormes,

* Pitched, fixed.

His

His top was bald, and waſted with wormes,
His honour decayed, his branches ſere.

FEBRUARY.

THIS deſcription is ſo lively, that a *viſible* repreſentation of the object can ſcarcely be deſired: if it were, I would refer to the ſplendid edition of Evelyn's *Sylva*, lately publiſhed by Dr. Hunter of York, in which, the view of the *Cawthorpe Oak* is as perfect a delineation of the poet's idea, as if it had been drawn for the purpoſe.

IT has been remarked that Homer's compariſons, though excellent as paintings from nature, are often but imperfectly adapted to the circumſtance which gives occaſion to them. Later writers have ſeldom been faulty in this reſpect;

reſpect; but, on the other hand, they have generally been too ſparing of ſuch particulars as might afford characteriſtical deſcriptions of the reſembling objects. It is in great meaſure owing to this defect, that they ſo much fail in that variety, novelty, and diſtinctneſs of imagery which conſtitute the true riches of poetry. A ſimile may perfectly anſwer the end of *explanation*, without offering any thing new or engaging to the mind. Such an one might be excellent for the purpoſe of inſtruction, but comes far ſhort of poetical merit.

THE following ſimile from Milton may be inſtanced as an example of equal perfection both in the deſcription and the application. The Devil viewing

ing Adam and Eve in Paradiſe is thus reſembled.

——— as a tiger, who by chance hath ſpy'd
In ſome purlieu two gentle fawns at play,
Strait couches cloſe, then riſing changes oft
His couchant watch, as one who choſe his ground,
Whence ruſhing he might ſureſt ſeize them both
Grip'd in each paw.

PAR. LOST.

NOT inferior in correctneſs, though leſs elevated in its ſubject, is that beautiful one of Gay in his ballad of *William and Suſan*.

So the ſweet lark, high pois'd in air,
Shuts cloſe his pinions to his breaſt
If chance his mate's ſhrill call he hear,
And drops at once into her neſt.

I HOPE I ſhall not be thought influenced

enced by fraternal partiality in adding, from Mrs. Barbauld's Poems, a ſimile, the converſe of thoſe before quoted, in which a ſubject of natural hiſtory is adorned by a compariſon equally ſtriking from its novelty, and happy in its application. The writer is deſcribing the transformation of the caterpillar from its *chryſalis* to its butterfly ſtate.

So when Rinaldo ſtruck the conſcious rind
He found a nymph in every trunk confin'd;
The foreſt labours with convulſive throes,
The burſting trees the lovely births diſcloſe,
And a gay troop of damſels round him ſtood,
Where late was rugged bark and lifeleſs wood.

To Mrs. P----. with Drawings.

To illuſtrate and enforce *moral precepts* by alluſions to the manners of animals in the way of fable was an inven-

tion of the earlieſt antiquity. No compoſitions have been ſo univerſally popular as thoſe of the fabuliſts of different nations; and notwithſtanding all the viciſſitudes of taſte and ſyſtem, we ſtill read with delight their inſtructive leſſons, becauſe they are inculcated by examples as familiar to the mind at the preſent day, as they were two or three thouſand years ago. In proportion, however, as the familiarity of theſe inſtances is requiſite to their effect in a fable, it is evident that no minute or uncommon relations in natural hiſtory can with propriety be introduced into theſe compoſitions. Some general caſt of character, ſome obvious and well-known properties, in the animals which form the *dramatis perſonæ* of fable, muſt be the ground-work of every alluſive tale. The generous courage of the Lion

Lion, the cruelty of the Tiger, the cunning of the Fox, the fidelity of the Dog, the ſtupidity of the Aſs, and the like, are permanent and diſtinguiſhing attributes, from the operation of which, in various ſituations, the incidents proper for fabulous ſtory ariſe. Fable conſiders every animal as a human creature; and therefore has to do only with ſuch of its qualities as bear a reſemblance to the affections and manners of mankind, not with ſuch as peculiarly conſtitute its natural hiſtory. It is indeed highly requiſite that as much of the latter as is neceſſary in tracing out the ſubject and ſcenery of a fable ſhould be repreſented with truth and accuracy; and the many errors of this kind which have been admitted into collections of fables are to be lamented as a ſource of falſe opinions,

which, from their early poſſeſſion of the mind, are frequently never to be eradicated.

ALTHOUGH the walk of fable is thus unfit for the diſplay of that novelty which natural hiſtory affords, there are methods in which more circumſtantial and appropriated deſcriptions of nature might be made very happily to accord with the conveyance of moral inſtruction. A moſt pleaſing example of this kind, which has all the merit of originality as well as beauty, is exhibited in a poem of Mr. Jago's, (*Dodſley's Coll. vol.* V.) entitled *the Swallows*. The ingenious and benevolent writer, who in his Elegies of the *Goldfinches* and *Blackbirds* has pathetically pleaded the rights of humanity with reſpect to

the

the feathered race, in this piece, from that providential inſtinct which incites the ſwallow tribe to launch fearleſs on the unbounded ſky in queſt of a retreat from the ſtorms of winter, deduces with perſuaſive energy the reaſonableneſs of a confidential reliance on the ſame providence, in our flight from the ſtormy regions of this life to a peaceful futurity.

And does no power its friendly aid diſpenſe,
Nor give *us* tidings of ſome happier clime?
Find *we* no guide in gracious Providence
Beyond the ſtroke of death, the verge of time!

A fine vein of deſcriptive poetry is intermixed with the moral ſentiment of this little piece, ſo that he has ſhewn himſelf an elegant obſerver of nature, as well as a forcible preacher.

The return of the ſwallows, in particular, is beautifully painted.

At length the winter's ſurly blaſts are o'er;
Array'd in ſmiles the lovely ſpring returns:
Health to the breeze unbars the ſcreaming door,
And every breaſt with heat celeſtial burns.

Again the daiſies peep, the violets blow,
Again the tenants of the leafy grove,
Forgot the patt'ring hail, the driving ſnow,
Reſume the lay to melody and love.

And ſee, my Delia, ſee o'er yonder ſtream,
Where on the ſunny bank the lambkins play,
Alike attracted to th' enlivening gleam,
The ſtranger ſwallows take their wonted way.

NOTHING can be better imagined, or more conſonant to the natural hiſtory of theſe birds, than their ſuppoſed converſation on their return.

I'll think I hear you tell of diſtant lands,
What inſect nations riſe from Egypt's mud,
What

What painted ſwarms ſubſiſt on Lybia's ſands,
What mild Euphrates yields, and Ganges' flood.

I cannot but attribute a degree of merit to this poem, higher than its mere poetical excellence might claim, on account of its being the model of a new combination of moral precept with natural deſcription, greatly ſuperior, in many reſpects, to fable. To encourage the imitation of this, as well as the other beauties which have been exemplified in the preceding pages, by ſhewing that their ſource is ſtill open and unexhauſted, will more particularly be the buſineſs of the remaining part of this Eſſay.

PLINY has already been mentioned as a naturaliſt who throws into his

deſcriptions all the fire and elevation of a poet. He may therefore be advantageouſly ſtudied not only for the matter of his relations, but the ſtyle in which they are cloathed; for as the former is often extremely curious and entertaining, and indeed of better authority than is commonly imagined, ſo the latter is remarkably bold, expreſſive, and energetic.* It would be difficult for a writer in poetry to improve the following deſcription, in which the Dog is repreſented with a

* A RELISH for the beauties of this author, and an eſteem for the ſtudy of natural hiſtory, induced the writer of this Eſſay lately to publiſh ſome ſelect pieces, chiefly extracted from the zoological parts of his work, which, while they where principally deſigned for the uſe of ſchools, might at the ſame time be not unacceptable to ſuch claſſical readers as ſhould wiſh to obtain a general knowledge of this author's manner and language, without the labour of turning over his voluminous writings.

charac-

character of courage and magnanimity equal to that of Homer's lions, and as ſuitable for heroical compariſon.

"Indiam petenti Alexandro Magno, "rex Albaniæ dono dederat inuſitatæ "magnitudinis unum: cujus ſpecie de- "lectatus juſſit urſos, mox apros, et de- "inde damas emitti, contemtu immo- "bili jacente eo. Qua ſegnitie tanti cor- "poris offenſus Imperator generoſi ſpiri- "tus, eum interimi juſſit. Nuntiavit hoc "fama regi. Itaque alterum mittens ad- "didit mandata, ne in parvis experiri "vellet, ſed in leone, elephantove. Duos "ſibi fuiſſe: hoc interemto, præterea "nullum fore. Nec diſtulit Alexander, "leonemque fractum protinus vidit. "Poſtea elephantum juſſit induci, haud

"alio

" alio magis ſpectaculo lætatus. Hor-
" rentibus quippe per totum corpus vil-
" lis, ingenti primum latratu intonuit:
" moxque increvit adſultans, contraque
" belluam exſurgens hinc et illinc, arti-
" fici dimicatione, qua maxime opus
" eſſet, infeſtans atque evitans, donec
" aſſidua rotatam vertigine adflixit, ad
" caſum ejus tellure concuſſa."

"ALEXANDER the Great on his expedition to India received from the king of Albania a preſent of a dog of uncommon bigneſs. Struck with its appearance, he commanded bears, wild boars, and ſtags to be turned out ſucceſſively before it; but the animal lay ſtill in quiet contempt. The generous prince, offended at ſuch want of ſpirit in ſo vaſt a bulk, ordered the dog to be killed. The Albanian king, hearing of this, ſent another,

the

the only one of the kind remaining, with a requeſt that they would try him, not with inferior kinds of game, but with a lion or an elephant. Alexander complied, and beheld a lion inſtantly torn to pieces. Greatly delighted with the ſpectacle, he then commanded an elephant to be brought out before him. The dog, briſtling up the hairs of his whole body, firſt thundered with a terrible barking; then flew at the elephant, and riſing to him on this and that ſide, artfully attacking and yielding by turns, made him ſo giddy with the inceſſant rotation, that at length he fell, the earth ſhaking at his fall."

THE manner in which the ſea-eagle ſtrikes its prey is deſcribed with ſimilar force and elegance, and forms an image well adapted to poetical repreſentation.

After

After ſpeaking of the other ſpecies of eagles, he ſays, " Supereſt haliaetos, " clariſſima oculorum acie, librans ex " alto ſeſe ; viſoque in mari piſce, præ- " ceps in eum ruens, & diſcuſſis pectore " aquis rapiens." " The ſea-eagle remains, endowed with a moſt piercing ſight : he balances himſelf on high, and eſpying a fiſh in the ſea, deſcends precipitately upon it, and ſeizes it, daſhing aſunder the waves with his breaſt." The ſtriking appearance of this rapid deſcent has not eſcaped the notice of other naturaliſts. The oſprey, a bird of the aquiline claſs, which takes its prey in this manner, has the expreſſive name of *leaden eagle*, " Auguiſta piumbina," given it by the Italians ; and on the ſame account the term *Cataracta*

racta is applied to a particular ſpecies of gull.

VARIOUS compariſons have been framed by the poets to repreſent in a forcible and lively manner the ſituation of a perſon enjoying himſelf in ſecurity, thoughtleſs of ſome impending danger. Gray, in his poem of *the Bard*, has in a very ſublime and beautiful manner wrought up a common image to this purpoſe.

Fair laughs the morn, and ſoft the Zephyr blows,
While proudly riding o'er the azure realm
In gallant trim the gilded Veſſel goes;
Youth on the prow, and Pleaſure at the helm;
Regardleſs of the ſweeping Whirlwind's ſway,
That huſh'd in grim repoſe, expects his evening prey.

AN

An image exactly correſpondent to this, and although leſs ſublime, equally expreſſive and pictureſque, might be copied from Pliny's account of the pigeon. This bird, he ſays, appears to have a ſenſe of pride, exhibited not only in the oſtentatious diſplay of its colours, but in a wanton manner of figuring in its flight, and clapping its wings, which occaſions it ſometimes to entangle its feathers, and offer itſelf an eaſy prey to its deadly foe, the hawk. "Spectat occultus "fronde latro, et gaudentem in ipſa "gloria rapit." "The felon marks him, concealed among the leaves, and ſnatches him away in the midſt of his glory."

His deſcription of the birds called *apodes*, which Mr. Pennant ſuppoſes to be the *ſtormy petrel*, is very lively, and would

would make a pleaſing figure in a ſea-piece. "Hæ ſunt, quæ toto mari cer-"nuntur: nec umquam tam longo na-"ves, tamque continuo curſu recedunt "a terra, ut non circumvolitent eas a-"podes. Cetera genera reſidunt et in-"ſiſtunt: his quies, niſi in nido, nulla: "aut pendent, aut jacent." "Theſe are the birds which are every-where ſeen at ſea, nor are ſhips ever ſo far or ſo long diſtant from land, but the Apodes fly round them. Others of the feathered kind reſt at times by ſtanding or ſitting: theſe have no repoſe but in their neſts. ---they are always either ſuſpended or recumbent."

Objects little and inconſiderable when taken ſingly, may acquire importance, and ſuggeſt ideas of grandeur and ſubli-

ſublimity, when preſented in collected numbers. A ſingle grain of ſand is a thing too minute for any purpoſe of deſcription or compariſon, but "the ſands of the ſea ſhore" form an image of multitude ſufficiently grand and elevated for the higheſt ſpecies of compoſition. This remark will apply to ſeveral of the ſmaller ſubjects of the animal creation; which, though individually unfit for poetical imagery, are rendered peculiarly ſtriking objects from their immenſe numbers. The dire armies of locuſts which overſpread many of the ſouthern countries at certain ſeaſons, are magnificently deſcribed in ſeveral parts of Scripture. They are ſaid to "darken the ſun," to bring "a day of clouds and thick darkneſs," to be "a nation ſtrong and without number, like a ſtrong people

ple ſet in battle array;" whoſe noiſe is like that "of chariots on the tops of the mountains,---of a flame of fire that devoureth the ſtubble;" before whom "the land is as the garden of Eden," but "behind them a deſolate wilderneſs."* Dr. Shaw, by whoſe excellent zoological remarks in his *Travels* ſo many paſſages in the Sacred Writings have been elucidated, has ſhewn, from the teſtimony of his own obſervation, that theſe poetical expreſſions are ſcarcely hyperbolical with reſpect to this formidable inſect. And our elegant Roman naturaliſt gives a deſcription of its migratory ſwarms, which, while it is more particular, is almoſt equally ſublime with that of the eaſtern poet,

* Joel, ch. I. and II.

"Deorum iræ peſtis ea intelligitur.
"Namque et grandiores cernuntur, et
"tanto volant pennarum ſtridore, ut
"aliæ alites credantur: Solemque obum-
"brant, ſollicitis ſuſpectantibus popu-
"lis, ne ſuas operiant terras. Suffici-
"unt quippe vires: et tamquam parum
"ſit maria tranſiſſe, immenſos tractus
"permeant, diraque meſſibus conte-
"gunt nube, multa contactu aduren-
"tes: omnia vero morſu erodentes,
"et fores quoque tectorum."

"This plague is conſidered as a ma-
niſeſtation of the wrath of the Gods.
For they appear of an unuſual ſize; and
fly with ſuch a noiſe from the motion
of their wings, that they might be
taken for birds. They darken the ſun;
and the nations view them in anxious
ſuſpenſe,

ſuſpenſe, each apprehenſive leſt their own lands ſhould be overſpread by them. For their ſtrength is unfailing; and as if it were a ſmall thing to have croſſed oceans, they pervade immenſe tracts of land, and cover the harveſts with a dreadful cloud; their very touch deſtroying many of the fruits of the earth, but their bite utterly conſuming all its products, and even the doors of houſes." *

VARIOUS other images of multitude, equally ſtriking, might be derived from obſervations in natural hiſtory. What, for inſtance, can offer ſo lively a com-

* As extraordinary as this circumſtance may appear, Mr. Adanſon mentions a very ſimilar one to which he was witneſs — A ſwarm of locuſts at Senegal devoured even the dry reeds with which the huts were thatched.

pariſon of the vaſt *human* ſwarms which at different periods have migrated from the *northern hive*, as the deſcent of the *Lemings* from the mountains of the ſame region; whoſe immenſe numbers, wonderful order and unconquerable pertinacity, render their incurſions formidable, even to human ſtrength and contrivance? In the following curious relation, one of the minuteſt tribe of inſects appears with an air of grandeur and importance from being collected in numbers beyond the power of computation.

"During my ſtay," ſays Smith, "at Cape Coaſt Caſtle, a body of "theſe ants came to pay us a viſit "in our fortification. It was about "day-break when the advanced guard "of this famiſhed crew entered the "chapel,

" chapel, where ſome negro ſervants
" were aſleep upon the floor. The
" men were quickly alarmed at the
" invaſion of this unexpected army,
" and prepared, as well as they could,
" for a defence. While the foremoſt
" battalion of inſects had already ta-
" ken poſſeſſion of the place, the
" rear-guard was more than a quar-
" ter of a mile diſtant. The whole
" ground ſeemed alive, and crawling
" with unceaſing deſtruction. After
" deliberating a few moments upon
" what was to be done, it was reſol-
" ved to lay a large train of gunpow-
" der along the path they had taken;
" by this means millions were blown
" to pieces; and the rear-guard per-
" ceiving the deſtruction of their lea-
" ders, thought proper inſtantly to

"return, and make back to their o-
"riginal habitation."

But almoſt every idea of multitude is ſurpaſſed by that of the herring ſhoals, which annually leave their great winter rendezvous in the arctic circle, and move in a mighty army towards the ſouth. Mr. Pennant's deſcription of this remarkable phenomenon is equally elegant and lively.

"They begin to appear off the
"Shetland Iſles in April and May;
"theſe are only forerunners of the
"grand ſhoal which comes in June,
"and their appearance is marked by
"certain ſigns by the numbers of
"birds, ſuch as gannets, and others
"which follow to prey on them: but
when

"when the main body approaches, "its breadth and its depth is ſuch "as to alter the appearance of the "very ocean. It is divided into diſ- "tinct columns of five or ſix miles "in length, and three or four in "breadth, and they drive the wa- "ter before them with a kind of rip- "pling: ſometimes they ſink for the "ſpace of ten or fifteen minutes, then "riſe again to the ſurface, and in "bright weather reflect a variety of "ſplendid colors, like a field of the "moſt precious gems.

THE ſhoals that liberally offer themſelves for the food and maintenance of ſo large a ſhare of the human ſpecies, at our moſt celebrated fiſheries, are only ſmall detachments from this innu-

merable hoſt.——But to return to beauties of a more varied and characteriſtic kind.

WERE a ſecond Thomſon to ariſe among us, he might derive ſeveral pleaſing additions to the rural ſcenery and poetical calendar of this country from the work already ſo often referred to, Mr. Pennant's *Britiſh Zoology*. Some of the circumſtances which I ſhall ſelect from it, are ſo exactly ſuited to the manner of that admirable poet, that we may be aſſured he would have made uſe of them, had they occurred to his mind.

AMONG the ſigns which announce the very earlieſt approach of ſpring, he would have dwelt with delight upon the intereſting and pictureſque figure of

of the Miſſel-thruſh, the largeſt of our ſongſters; concerning which Mr. Pennant acquaints us, that "it begins its "ſong, which is very fine, ſitting on "the ſummit of a high tree, very early "in the ſpring, often with the new "year, in blowing ſhowery weather; "whence the inhabitants of Hampſhire "call it the *Storm-cock*."

We have ſeen how exquiſitely Thomſon has painted a hot ſummer's noon, by a group of animals oppreſſed with languor under the beams of a meridian ſun. Were the inſtant of time changed, and the effects of a leſs overpowering heat to be repreſented, a diſtinguiſhed place in the landſkip might be allotted to the fox, which "in warm weather "will quit its habitation for the ſake of baſking

" baſking in the ſun, or to enjoy the " freſh air; but then it rarely lies ex- " poſed, but chuſes ſome thick brake, " and generally of gorſe, that it may " reſt ſecure from ſurpriſe. Crows, " magpies, and other birds, who con- " ſider the fox as their common enemy, " will often, by their notes of anger, " point out its retreat."

It is ſomewhat extraordinary that the very curious œconomy of the decoys for wild ducks ſhould have eſcaped Thomſon's notice. The marſhy wooded ſolitudes in which they are placed; the art with which they are conſtructed; the wonderful inſtinct which renders theſe creatures capable of being taught to be the crafty betrayers of their companions; the ſurpriſe and ſtruggle of the

the ſtrangers on finding themſelves unexpectedly entrapped, would all together afford copious matter as well for ſentiment as deſcription. A circumſtance relating to them, mentioned by Mr. Pennant, would be a pleaſing, and entirely new object in an evening picture. "As ſoon as the evening ſets "in, the decoy *riſes* (as they term it) "and the wild fowl feed during night. "If the evening is ſtill, the noiſe of "their wings, during their flight, is "heard at a great diſtance, and is a "pleaſing, though rather melancholy "ſound."

THE agreeable uſe Mr. Jago has made of the migration of ſwallows, was juſt now remarked. The moral plan of his poem rendered it leſs proper

per to enter minutely into the natural part of the phenomenon; but a deſcriptive poet might greatly improve the picture from Mr. Pennant's article on that ſubject. With what pleaſing and pictureſque circumſtances are the departure and return of the ſwallows repreſented in the two following relations? "Mr. White (a clergyman "of Selborne, Hants) on Michael-"mas 1768, had the good fortune to "have ocular proof of what may rea-"ſonably be ſuppoſed an actual migra-"tion of ſwallows. Travelling that "morning very early between his houſe "and the coaſt, at the beginning of "his journey he was environed with "a thick fog; but on a large wild heath "the miſt began to break, and diſcover-"ed to him numberleſs ſwallows, cluſ-

"tered

"tered on the ſtanding buſhes, as if "they had rooſted there: as ſoon as the "ſun burſt out, they were inſtantly on "wing, and with an eaſy and placid "flight, proceeded towards the ſea."

"RETURNING home" ſays Sir Charles Wager, "in the ſpring of the year, as "I came into ſounding in our channel, "a great flock of ſwallows came and "ſettled on all my rigging; every rope "was covered; they hung on one ano-"ther like a ſwarm of bees; the decks "and carving were filled with them. "They ſeemed almoſt famiſhed and "ſpent, and were only feathers and "bones; but being recruited with a "night's reſt, took their flight in the "morning."

THE

THE migration of birds in general, is indeed a fertile ſource of thoſe uncommon and even ſublime ideas which are eſſential to poetry. What more admirable than that ſecret impulſe which incites every individual of a whole ſpecies to croſs immenſe ſeas and tracts of land in ſearch of a ſecure retreat againſt unknown impending evils! What more beautiful than the order of their aſſembling and flight! What more aſtoniſhing than their prodigious numbers when congregated for this purpoſe! "I have ſeen," ſays Linnæus "the ſur-"face of the Calix, (a river in Lapland,) "for the ſpace of eight days and nights, "entirely covered with ducks, paſſing "towards the ſea on their ſouthern "journey, exceeding in number the "armies of Xerxes, ſo that I could not

"have

" have imagined that ſuch a multitude " of birds ever exiſted."

How ſingularly pictureſque is the appearance of the Baſs iſle in the Firth of Forth, as deſcribed by Dr. Harvey in his *Exercitations on the generation of animals!* I give the original Latin, as well as a tranſlation of the paſſage, as a ſpecimen of the claſſical elegance of ſtyle in which this great philoſopher wrote.

" Est inſula parva, Scoti Baſſe " nominant: haud amplius mille paſ- " ſuum circuitu amplitudo ejus clau- " ditur. Hujus inſulæ ſuperficies, " menſibus Maio & Junio nidis ovis " pulliſque propemodum tota inſtrata " eſt, adeo ut vix, præ eorum copia

" pedem

" pedem liberè ponere liceat: tanta-
" que ſupervolantium turba, ut nubi-
" um inſtar, ſolem cœlumque auferant:
" tantuſque vociferantium clangor &
" ſtrepitus, ut propè alloquentes vix au-
" dias. Si ſubjectum mare inde, tan-
" quam ex edita turri & altiſſimo præ-
" cipitio deſpexeris, idem quoquo ver-
" ſûm, infinitis diverſorum generum
" avibus natantibus prædæque inhianti-
" bus, opertum videas. Si circumna-
" vigando imminentum clivum ſuſpicere
" libuerit; videas in ſingulis prærupti
" loci crepidinibus & receſſibus, avi-
" um cujuſlibet generis & magnitudinis,
" ordines innumerabiles, plures ſanè
" quam nocte, ſereno cœlo, ſtellæ con-
" ſpiciuntur. Si advolantes avolanteſ-
" que eminùs adſpexeris, apum profec-

to

"to ingens examen credas." *Exercit.* 11.

"THERE is a ſmall Iſland, called by the Scotch *the Baſs*, not more than a mile in circumference. Its ſurface is almoſt entirely covered during the months of May and June with neſts, eggs, and young birds; ſo that it is difficult to ſet a foot without treading on them: while the flocks of birds flying round are ſo prodigious, that they darken the air like a cloud; and their noiſe and clamour is ſo great, that perſons can ſcarce hear one another ſpeak. If from the ſummit of the precipice you look down on the ſubjacent ocean, you ſee it on every ſide covered with infinite numbers of birds of different kinds, ſwimming and hunting

their prey. If you ſail round the iſland, and ſurvey the impending cliffs, you behold in every fiſſure and receſs of the craggy rocks innumerable ranks of birds of various kinds and ſizes, ſurpaſſing in multitude the ſtars in a ſerene ſky. If you view from a diſtance the flocks flying to and from the iſland, you may imagine them a vaſt ſwarm of bees."

MANY other of the weſtern iſles of Scotland offer ſpectacles equally grand and amuſing; ſo that the barrenneſs of the vegetable creation in theſe regions, is amply compenſated, with reſpect to the imagination at leaſt, by the animated treaſures of the ſea and ſky. Thomſon was by no means inſenſible of the deſcriptive beauties ariſing

ſing from this ſource which his own country afforded. He has however contented himſelf with a very general, though indeed a ſtriking view of them.

——where the Northern ocean, in vaſt whirls,
Boils round the naked melancholy iſles
Of fartheſt Thule, and th' Atlantic ſurge
Pours in among the naked Hebrides;
Who can recount what tranſmigrations there
Are annual made? what nations come and go?
And how the living clouds on clouds ariſe!
Infinite wings! till all the plume-dark air,
And rude reſounding ſhore are one wild cry.

WERE I to propoſe a ſubject for deſcriptive poetry, which at the ſame time that it afforded uncommon ſcope for grand and original painting in natural hiſtory, alſo offered copious matter for philoſophical and moral reflex-

ion, connected by ſtrict unity of deſign, I ſhould mention, in preference to any other that at preſent occurs to me, that of the *migration of birds*. The knowledge, indeed, requiſite for treating this ſubject in a maſterly manner, would be ſuperior to that of the profeſſed naturaliſt; ſince this branch of his reſearches is yet in its infancy. Many curious circumſtances, however, might be collected for the purpoſe, from the writings of thoſe who have already paid the moſt attention to it;* and for the reſt, the poet ſhould think it incumbent upon him to diſcover and inveſtigate *new facts*, as well as to frame *new combinations of words*.

* See Mr. Pennant's Paper on the *Migration of Britiſh Birds*. Br. Zool. V. II. Append. No. VI. edit. 4th.

In the former part of this Eſſay, a quotation from Thomſon was introduced, for the purpoſe of ſhewing how much novelty this original obſerver had given to one of the moſt common ſubjects of rural deſcription, the ſinging of birds. Yet he, as well as every other poet, has failed to remark a circumſtance which might add a pleaſing variety to this topic. This is the manner in which young birds practice their ſongs as learners, well known to the bird-catchers by the term *recording*. The Hon. Mr. Daines Barrington, in his *Experiments and Obſervations on the Singing of Birds*, Phil. Tranſ. Vol. LXIII. elegantly deſcribes it in the following paſſage.

"This firſt eſſay does not ſeem to

" have the leaſt rudiments of the fu-
" ture ſong; but as the bird grows old-
" er and ſtronger, one may begin to
" perceive what the neſtling is aiming
" at. Whilſt the ſcholar is thus en-
" deavouring to form his ſong, when
" he is once ſure of a paſſage, he
" commonly raiſes his tone, which
" he drops again when he is not e-
" qual to what he is attempting; juſt
" as a ſinger raiſes his voice, when
" he not only recollects certain parts
" of a tune with preciſion, but knows
" that he can execute them. What
" the neſtling is not thus thoroughly
" maſter of, he hurries over, lowering
" his tone, as if he did not wiſh to
" be heard, and could not yet ſatisfy
" himſelf."

THIS *recording* laſts for ten or eleven months, which makes it more extraordinary that no poetical obſerver has taken notice of it. Mr. Barrington gives the following lines from the *Sylvæ* of Statius as the only paſſage in which it ſeems the leaſt hinted at.

——————— Nunc volucrum novi
Quæſtus, inexpertumque carmen,
Quod tacitâ ſtatuere brumâ.

Now in new ſtrains the feather'd choir complain,
And untried lays, in ſilent winter plann'd.

PLINY, however, in his account of the nightingale, minutely deſcribes the ſtate of a learner of that ſpecies. "Meditantur aliæ juniores, verſuſque, "quos imitentur, accipiunt. Audit diſ-

"cipula intentione magna, et reddit: "vicibuſque reticent. Intelligitur emen- "datæ correptio, et in docente quædam "reprehenſio." "The younger ſort meditate and receive leſſons for their imitation. The ſcholar liſtens with great attention, and repeats; and each is ſilent by turns. An attempt to mend in a corrected paſſage may be perceived; and a kind of reprehenſion in the teacher."

From the ſame ingenious paper of Mr. Barrington's we learn, that the muſic of the nightingale, of which the highly laboured deſcriptions of Pliny and Strada, copied by the poets, have given only confuſed and indefinite ideas, has in reality all the excellencies

cies aſcribed to it, but excellencies of a kind which may be clearly and ſcientifically ſtated.

"ITS tone," ſays he, "is infinitely more mellow than that of any "other bird, though at the ſame time, "by a proper exertion of its muſical "powers, it can be exceſſively brilliant.

"WHEN this bird, (a very fine caged "nightingale which Mr. B. kept) *ſang its* "*ſong round*, in its whole compaſs, I have "obſerved ſixteen different beginnings "and cloſes, at the ſame time that the "intermediate notes were commonly "varied in their ſucceſſion with ſuch "judgment

" judgment as to produce a moſt plea-
" ſing variety.*

" THE next point of ſuperiority in
" a nightingale, is its continuance of
" ſong, without a pauſe, which I have
" obſerved ſometimes not to be leſs
" than twenty ſeconds. Whenever
" reſpiration, however, became neceſ-
" ſary, it was taken with as much judg-
" ment as by an opera ſinger."

" BUT it is not only in tone and va-

* THIS variety of the nightingale's ſong is moſt poetically expreſſed in a line of Homer's *Odyſſey*, B. XIX. V. 521.

Ἠτε θαμα τρωπωσα χεει πολυηχεα φωνην.

MR. POPE's tranſlation of it is exceſſively languid.

" To vernal airs attunes her varied ſtrain."

I SHALL venture to offer one, which, at leaſt, approaches nearer to the original.

Quick varying pours her many-ſounding ſtrain.

" riety

"riety that the nightingale excells; the "bird alſo ſings (if I may ſo expreſs "myſelf) with ſuperior judgment and "taſte."

"I HAVE therefore commonly ob- "ſerved that my nightingale began "ſoftly like the ancient orators; re- "ſerving its breath to ſwell certain "notes, which by this means had "a moſt aſtoniſhing effect, and which "eludes all verbal deſcription."

IF poets have been inattentive to the real ſtate of nature in their own country, it cannot be expected that their pictures of foreign regions ſhould be accurate and characteriſtic. Yet, were they ſufficiently qualified by their own obſervation, or the authentic accounts

counts of others, for the attempt, it is obvious that no ſource could be ſo productive of novelty, as the deſcription of countries where almoſt every object is new. Such, to the inhabitant of a temperate climate, are the polar and tropical parts of the globe. It is highly to the credit of Virgil's genius, that he firſt among the ancient poets ventured to tranſport his reader into a new world, and place the ſoft Italian amid the rigours of a Scythian winter.* His deſcription of this dreary ſcene has been thought ſo juſt and lively, as to be very cloſely imitated even by the natural Thomſon; who has, however, according to his uſual manner, greatly improved upon it, by the addition of new circumſtances. To the flocks and herds

* Georg. III. v. 349 and ſeq.

buried

buried in ſnow, and the hunted ſtag unable to make way through the oppoſing maſs, which ſo much enliven the winter-piece of Virgil, he adds the "furry nations" that form the chief riches of the Siberian deſarts;

——— ——— ——— ——— tipt with jet,
Fair ermines, ſpotleſs as the ſnows they preſs;
Sables of gloſſy black; and dark-embrown'd,
Or beauteous freakt with many a mingled hue,
Thouſands beſides, the coſtly pride of courts.

And he fills up the meaſure of horror reſiding in theſe deſolate regions, by a moſt animated picture of their congenial inhabitant, the bear.

There thro' the piny foreſt half abſorpt,
Rough tenant of theſe ſhades, the ſhapeleſs bear,
With dangling ice all horrid, ſtalks forlorn;
Slow-pac'd, and ſourer as the ſtorms increaſe,

He

He makes his bed beneath th' inclement drift,
And, with ſtern patience, ſcorning weak complaint,
Hardens his heart again aſſailing want.

But our original painter does not here relinquiſh the idea of deriving novelty from the foreign and diſtant ſcenery of his pieces. Writing for more northern readers than the Roman poet did, he judiciouſly proceeds ſtill nearer the pole, and gives a view of the face of nature and human manners in Lapland. His juſt and ſpirited ſketch might, however, receive conſiderable improvement from the natural hiſtory of that animal upon which almoſt the whole œconomy of the Laplander turns, the Reindeer, as it is given with much elegance as well as accuracy by a Swediſh writer in the *Amænitates Academicæ.*

In

In that vaſt chain of mountains which divides the Norwegian from the Swediſh Lapland, amidſt perpetual ſtorms and everlaſting ſnows, the Reindeer paſſes the ſhort ſummer of the polar regions, grazing at large on the white *Lichen*, which is almoſt the ſole vegetable production of the ſteril ſoil. Here he finds a refuge againſt the immenſe ſwarms of inſects which fill all the lakes and marſhes of that country, one of which, a ſpecies of *oeſtrus* or gad-fly, he ſo much dreads, from its property of depoſiting its eggs in his back, that the noiſe of a ſingle one hovering in the air drives a whole herd, in ſpite of the efforts of the herdſman and his dog, to the very ſummits of the higheſt hills. In winter, qualified as he is by nature to endure the extremity of cold, he is yet

yet obliged to deſcend to the woody region which every where ſkirts the deſart tract at the foot of the mountains. Here a different kind of moſs, or *lichen*, finds a ſhelter in the thick foreſts of pine from the intenſe froſts; and the Reindeer, provided with a callous ſkin at the end of his ſnout, is enabled to come at his food, though deep buried in the ſnow. No farmer in the milder countries of Europe can more rejoice at viewing his meadows cloathed with cheerful green, than the Laplander at the ſight of his dreary moors whitened over with the vegetable which is to be the ſuſtenance of his herd. In theſe wild ſolitudes he paſſes day and night, abroad, in the bittereſt inclemency of the ſeaſons, ſecurely wrapt in garments ſupplied by his faithful Reindeer; the milk and

fleſh of which is his principal food, and the number, his only riches. This is the paſtoral life in Lapland! A ſtriking contraſt indeed to that in the ſoft climates of Arcadia and Sicily; yet not without its charms to the ſimple native, nor unprovided with ſubjects for deſcriptive poetry.

If from hence we turn our eyes to countries "nimio ſub ſole calentes," burning under a vertical ſun, we ſhall diſcover a face of nature ſtill more different from that of a temperate climate, and inexhauſtibly fertile in new and ſtriking objects. The vegetable and animal creations, the very earth, rivers and ſeas, are all on a ſcale and after a model ſo unlike thoſe of our world, that the ſlighteſt view cannot fail of

offering novelty and exciting wonder. As Thomſon has ſo forcibly deepened the horrors of his *Winter* from the Pole, ſo he has not been leſs ſucceſsful in heightening the brilliancy of his *Summer* from the Line. What a rich garden of Exotics does he ſpread before us in the following lines?

Bear me, Pomona! to thy citron groves;
To where the lemon and the piercing lime,
With the deep orange, glowing thro' the green,
Their lighter glories blend. Lay me reclin'd
Beneath the ſpreading tamarind that ſhakes,
Fann'd by the breeze, its fever-cooling fruit.
Deep in the night the maſſy locuſt ſheds,
Quench my hot limbs; or lead me thro' the maze,
Embowering endleſs, of the Indian fig;
Or thrown at gayer eaſe, on ſome fair brow,
Let me behold, by breezy murmurs cool'd,
Broad o'er my head the verdant cedar wave,
And high palmetos lift their graceful ſhade.

O ſtretch'd

O ſtretch'd amid theſe orchards of the ſun,
Give me to drain the cocoa's milky bowl,
And from the palm to draw its freſhening wine!

THESE are the *beauties* of the vegetable race: but if dignity and grandeur are the characters we deſire, what can be a more majeſtic object than the *Palma Maxima*,* which grows, perfectly ſtraight and regular, to the amazing height of one hundred and twenty feet? What a more aſtoniſhing ſpectacle than the prodigious maſs of wood reared up in the *Calabaſh tree*, which ſinks our nobleſt oaks into ſhrubs? Mr. Adanſon meaſured two of theſe, the trunks of which were, one, ſeventy four, the other, ſeventy ſeven feet in

* WRETCHEDLY degraded by its vulgar name of the *Cabbage tree!*

circumference; or above twenty five in diameter. Single branches of theſe, he ſays, would have made ſome of the largeſt trees in Europe; and the whole ſeemed to form a foreſt of itſelf.

All the ſeveral parts of Nature correſpond with each other. Under the ſhade of theſe mighty vegetables walk the elephant and rhinoceros. The vaſt rivers of the ſouthern continents are inhabited by the crocodile and hippopotamus. The unrelenting heat of the tropical ſun is, as it were, reflected in the untameable fierceneſs of the beaſts of prey which ſpread deſolation far and wide through the deſarts of theſe regions; and in the exalted rage and venom of the numerous ſerpents with which they are infeſted. What infinite ſcope

for

for new and ſtriking deſcription would the animal hiſtory of theſe countries afford to the poet who ſhould be able to draw it from original ſources! Even the *ſketches* of Thomſon on this ſubject are finer pictures than almoſt any others in deſcriptive poetry. What magnificence in the ſcenery of the following lines!

Along theſe lonely regions, where retir'd,
From little ſcenes of art, great Nature dwells
In awful ſolitude, and nought is ſeen
But the wild herds that own no maſter's ſtall,
Prodigious rivers roll their fatning ſeas:
On whoſe luxuriant herbage, half-conceal'd,
Like a fallen cedar, far-diffus'd his train,
Cas'd in green ſcales, the crocodile extends.

———— ———— ———— ————

———— ———— ———— ————

Peaceful, beneath primeval trees that caſt
Their ample ſhade o'er Niger's yellow ſtream,

And where the Ganges rolls his ſacred wave;
Or mid the central depth of blackening woods,
High rais'd in ſolemn theatre around,
Leans the huge elephant.

HORROR, wrought up to its higheſt pitch, gives wonderful ſublimity to the paſſage repreſenting the nightly roamings of the beaſts of prey.

Theſe, ruſhing from th' inhoſpitable woods
Of Mauritania, or the tufted iſles,
That verdant riſe amid the Lybian wild,
Innumerous glare around their ſhaggy king,
Majeſtic, ſtalking o'er the printed ſand;
And, with imperious and repeated roars,
Demand their fated food. The fearful flocks
Croud near the guardian ſwain; the nobler herds,
Where round their lordly bull, in rural eaſe,
They ruminating lie, with horror hear
The coming rage. Th' awakened village ſtarts;
And to her fluttering breaſt the mother ſtrains
Her thoughtleſs infant. From the Pirate's den,

Or

Or ſtern Morocco's tyrant fang eſcap'd,
The wretch half-wiſhes for his bonds again:
While, uproar all, the wilderneſs reſounds,
From Atlas eaſtward to the frighted Nile.

Dr. Goldsmith had probably this deſcription in his memory when he drew the following picture of the ſame ſubject, which, however, he has rendered ſufficiently different by judiciouſly dwelling upon the natural hiſtory of the ſcene, rather than the paſſion it inſpires.

"Nothing can be more terrible than "an African landſcape at the cloſe of "evening: the deep toned roarings of "the lion; the ſhriller yellings of the "tyger; the jackall, purſuing by the "ſcent, and barking like a dog; the "hyæna, with a note peculiarly ſolitary

"and

"and dreadful; but to crown all, the "hiſſing of the various kinds of ſer- "pents, that at that time begin their "call, and, as I am aſſured, make a "much louder ſymphony than the "birds in our groves in a morning."

It is very rare that Thomſon does not excel when he imitates; yet the want of an accurate idea to work upon has injured the effect of ſome very fine lines,* apparently intended as a free copy from the accurate deſcription, already quoted, of the *Cherſydrus* of Virgil. The Latin poet deſcribes a particular ſpecies of ſerpent; Thomſon means to paint ſome large and terrible creature of that tribe, but without con-

* *Summer*, l. 897, & ſeq.

fining

fining the draught to one individual kind. His images are therefore too general and indiſcriminate.

Mr. Adanson, however, furniſhes ſome circumſtances for a deſcription of the enormous *gigantic ſerpent* of Africa, which a poet might employ with ſtriking effect. He conjectures this animal to be from forty to fifty foot long at its full growth; and thus deſcribes the manner in which it ſeeks its prey. "He lurks in moraſſes, and places not "far from the water. His tail is curled "two or three rounds of a circle, which "include a circumference from five to "ſix feet diameter, over which he "rears his head with part of his body. "In this attitude, and as it were im-"moveable, he throws his eyes all

"round

" round, and when he perceives an ani-
" mal within reach, he darts upon it
" by means of the circumvolutions of
" his tail, which have the ſame effect
" as a ſtrong ſpring."

THUS does every ſcene of nature, foreign or domeſtic, afford objects from whence an accurate ſurvey may derive new ideas of grandeur or beauty. Thus, where a careleſs eye only beholds an ordinary and indiſtinct landſkip, one accuſtomed to examine, compare, and diſcriminate will diſcern detached figures and groups, which, judiciouſly brought forwards, may be wrought into the moſt ſtriking pictures. Theſe ſimple propoſitions were not of a kind which *reaſoning* could render more evident. To give

give a lively impreſſion and feeling of their truth by *examples* was the only purpoſe to be purſued with advantage. Taſte may perhaps be fixed and explained by philoſophical inveſtigation; but it can only be *formed* by frequent contemplation of the objects with which it is converſant. This, it is hoped, will prove a ſufficient apology for the numerous quotations which compoſe ſo large a ſhare of this volume. Many of theſe, it is probable, will be familiar to the reader; but by appearing in a particular connexion, and being brought into compariſon with ſimilar paſſages, they may be viewed in new lights, and their beauties become more conſpicuous. At leaſt, they may renew many agreeable ideas in the reader's mind; and thus

ſecure

ſecure him ſome of that amuſement, which the critical part of the work might fail to afford.

THE END.

MUSEUM BRITANNICUM